

## ABSTRACT

### A Word Fitly Spoken Poetic Artistry in the First Four Acrostics of the Hebrew Psalter

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This dissertation explores the occurrences and the functions of various poetic devices within the four alphabetic acrostic psalms found in Book I of the Psalter. These psalms are: Pss 9/10; 25; 34; and 37. These acrostics are four out of a total of eight alphabetic acrostic poems found in the Psalter—the other four occurring in Book V. This study will also explore linguistic connections between the four Book I acrostics and will point to connections between some of the Book I and the Book V acrostics as an avenue deserving further investigation.

The majority scholarly opinion has been that these acrostics are deficient poetically and artistically due to the writers'/editors' preoccupation with the alphabetic pattern. In contrast to this view, the working hypothesis of this dissertation is that the alphabetic acrostic pattern contributes to, rather than detracts from, the poetic artistry of these psalms.

This study is primarily descriptive, consisting of a close reading of each of these Book I acrostics. The study highlights the functions of the various poetic devices found in these psalms. The study also sometimes highlights the linguistic connections and grammatical connections between the four acrostics and surrounding psalms in an effort

to promote a holistic, canonical reading of the four acrostic poems within Book I of the Psalter. The dissertation's close reading of these poems demonstrates over and over the emotive power and the imagination of this literature in contradiction to its supposedly stiff, wooden nature.

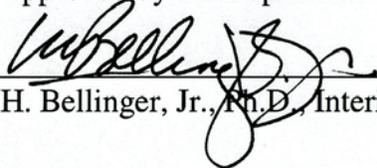
Finally, several times throughout this dissertation suggested, conventional emendations of the Masoretic Text are challenged and poetic or linguistically artistic solutions are proposed instead. This study is attuned to the frequent wordplays and plays on sound that occur throughout these four poems. Many times such considerations, as well as the preservation of grammatical parallelism within these acrostics, is a more desirable solution than is the emendation of the consonantal text.

by

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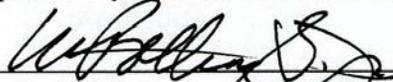
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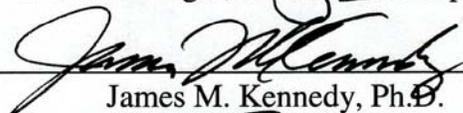
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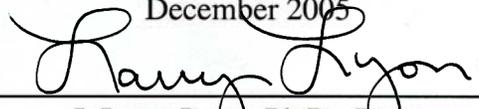
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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SIGNS

<i>Alleg. Interp.</i> 1, 2, 3	<i>Allegorical Interpretation</i> 1, 2, 3
AnOr	Analecta orientalia
<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Jewish Antiquities</i>
AB	Anchor Bible
<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992.
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
AOTS	Augsburg Old Testament Studies
BBE	Bible in Basic English
BDB	Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Oxford, 1907.
<i>BHS</i>	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> . Edited by K. Elliger and W. Rudolph. Stuttgart, 1983.
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BJS	Biblical and Judaic Studies
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BRS	Biblical Resource Series
BS	Biblical Series
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series

CC	Continental Commentaries
<i>Contempl. Life</i>	<i>On the Contemplative Life</i>
Deut	Deuteronomy
<i>Dreams 1, 2</i>	<i>On Dreams 1,2</i>
Exod	Exodus
FC	Fathers of the Church. Washington, D.C., 1947-
FMSS	Foundations of Modern Sociology Series
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship
Hab	Habakkuk
HALOT	Koehler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm. <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. Study edition. 2 vol. Leiden, 2001.
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Isa	Isaiah
JB	<i>Jerusalem Bible: The Holy Scriptures</i> . Revised and edited by Harold Fisch. Jerusalem, 1997.
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>

Josh	Joshua
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KBL	Koehler, L., and W. Baumgartner. <i>Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros</i> 2d ed. Leiden, 1958.
KJV	King James Version
LAI	Library of Ancient Israel
LBS	Library of Biblical Studies
LCBI	Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation
MT	Masoretic Text (of the OT)
<i>Moses 1, 2</i>	<i>On the Life of Moses 1, 2</i>
<i>Names</i>	<i>On the Change of Names</i>
NAB	New American Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NAU	New American Standard (updated)
NIV	New International Version
NJPS	<i>Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
Num	Numbers
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology

<i>OrTra</i>	<i>Oral Tradition</i>
OT	Old Testament
<i>OTE</i>	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>OtSt</i>	<i>Oudtestamentische Studien</i>
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
PG	Patrologia graeca. Edited by J.-P. Migne. 162 vols. Paris, 1857-1886.
PL	Patrologia latina. Edited by J.-P. Migne. 217 vols. Paris, 1844-1864.
Ps/Pss	Psalms
<i>Posterity</i>	<i>On the Posterity of Cain</i>
Prov	Proverbs
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
RNS 2	Recherches Nouvelle Série-2
RSV	Revised Standard Version
1-2 Sam	1-2 Samuel
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLSem	Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Series
SBLSS	Society of Biblical Literature Supplement Series
Sir	Sirach
<i>Sobriety</i>	<i>On Sobriety</i>
SOTI	Studies in Old Testament Interpretation

<i>ST</i>	<i>Studia theologica</i>
<i>StudBib</i>	<i>Studia Biblica</i>
StBL	Studies in Biblical Literature
TBS	The Biblical Seminar
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. 8 vols. Grand Rapids: 1974-
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, 1964-1976.
<i>ThViat</i>	<i>Theologia viatorum</i>
<i>TLOT</i>	<i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by E. Jenni, with assistance from Claus Westermann. Translated by M. E. Biddle. 3 vols. Peabody, Mass., 1997.
<i>TWOT</i>	<i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, Jr. 2 vols. Chicago, 1980.
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplements
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>Worse</i>	<i>That the Worse Attacks the Better</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZDMG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>
::	in contrast to
//	parallel to
→	consequentially, leading to

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my deepest and most sincere appreciation to my professor and mentor, Dr. W. H. Bellinger, Jr. This dissertation was inspired by Dr. Bellinger's contagious love for the Psalms and was nurtured by his consistent interest in the poetics of the alphabetic acrostics and by his constant encouragement. Whenever I may have felt overwhelmed, or simply fatigued, in this work, Dr. Bellinger was always a spring of enthusiasm. His spirit of inquiry and his spirit of excitement about exploring new ways of reading the Psalms provided ample encouragement to continue my exploration and work. This positive attitude and genuine personal interest in my work was especially critical in getting back on track after I spent over a year away from academics, serving as an Army chaplain in Iraq.

I would also like to express my appreciation to the other two members of my committee, Drs. James Kennedy and William Cooper. These two distinguished professors were, like Dr. Bellinger, as kind and as encouraging as they were helpful. Their sharp eyes for detail and their editorial suggestions (and questions) made this study more readable and much more precise than it would have been otherwise.

Finally, I express my deepest appreciation to the staff of the Baylor University libraries. In both my studies at Baylor, and in my work on this project, whenever I have had a need or a request or a question the library staff has been exemplary in their helpful and timely responses. They are, in my humble opinion, the epitome of kindness combined with professionalism.

To my wonderful wife, Margaret  
defender of Faith,  
partner in Hope,  
unsurpassed example of selfless Love  
פיה פתחה בחכמה ותורת־חסד על־לושנה  
Proverbs 31:26

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### *Overview*

It has long been recognized that the Hebrew Psalter contains a total of eight alphabetic acrostic poems.<sup>1</sup> These eight poems are equally distributed between the first and fifth books of the Psalter. Book I contains Pss 9/10; 25; 34, and 37 and Book V contains Pss 111; 112; 119, and 145. The literary term “acrostic” is used to refer to three different uses of alphabetic letters or signs. In some instances, the initial letters or characters of each line spell out a personal name when read downward. In other cases, when the initial letters/characters are read downward they constitute a sentence. These two types of acrostic poems appear in Babylonian literature.<sup>2</sup> The acrostics in the Psalter

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<sup>1</sup> For convenience sake, throughout this study I use “poem” and “psalm” interchangeably. I do, however, agree with the following statement from Herbert J. Levine, *Sing Unto God a New Song: A Contemporary Reading of the Psalms* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), xi: “. . . I like to think that this diversity [of methodologies] arises not from my eclecticism but from the nature of the Psalms themselves. The Psalms are not primarily poems, as some literary scholars would have it, but always prayer-poems, a hybrid of artistic and ritual concerns . . . The methodologies through which we choose to study them should reflect their hybrid nature.” On the “hybrid” nature of the psalms, see also Konrad Schaefer, *Psalms* (BERIT OLAM; ed. David W. Cotter; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2001), viii.

<sup>2</sup> See Will Soll, “Babylonian and Biblical Acrostics” *Bib* 68 (1988): 305-11 for a helpful survey of and bibliography pertaining to the seven extant Babylonian acrostics. On the longest acrostic from the ancient Near East, *The Babylonian Theodicy* (297 lines), see Soll, “Babylonian,” p. 310-11. For transliteration and translation of the *Theodicy*, see W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963; repr. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 63-91. On the personal name acrostic found in the Jewish/Christian Sibylline Oracles [circa 150 BCE – 180 CE] 8:217-50, see Soll,

are of a third kind—the initial letters read downward represent the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet, although the order is sometimes varied and sometimes the pattern is disrupted by missing letters.<sup>3</sup> And yet, despite these lacunae, the pattern is still impressive—so impressive that past investigations into the alphabetic pattern in these psalms have often attempted to “reconstruct” the original text so as to “mend” (emend) the apparently broken pattern.<sup>4</sup>

Another popular approach to these acrostic poems has been to focus on metrics, the structure of lines and the rhythm of syllables.<sup>5</sup> Most recently, in his work on Psalm 119, Freedman has convincingly demonstrated metrical and structural similarities between Pss

“Babylonian,” p. 317, n. 33. See also, Milton S. Terry, *The Sibylline Oracles* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1899), 171-73, 274-77. In canonical scripture we find six additional alphabetical acrostics: Nah. 1:2-8 (ז-ח); Prov 31:10-31; and Lam 1; 2; 3 and 4. Outside the canon we find three additional alphabetic acrostics: Sirach 51:13-30 (Cairo B manuscript; 11QPs<sup>a</sup>); Ps 155 and Apostrophe to Zion (both in 11QPs<sup>a</sup>). On these last three acrostics, see texts and translations in: James A. Sanders, ed., *The Psalms Scroll of Qumran Cave 11 (11QPsa)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965).

<sup>3</sup> For example, in Ps 9/10 the ט, ז, ו and ד lines are missing and the ב and י lines are switched. In Ps 25, we find no ק line but two ג lines. Finally, Ps 34 is missing the ל line.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Charles A. Briggs and Emilie G. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (ICC; 2 vols.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1906-1907), 1:70-71, 220-21, 324-25; Moses Bittenwieser, *The Psalms: Chronologically Treated with a New Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), 422-28, 858; Max Löhr, “Alphabetische und alphabetisierende Lieder im AT,” *ZAW* 25 (1905): 175-86; G. R. Driver, *Semitic Writing: From Pictograph to Alphabet* (3d ed., ed. S. A. Hopkins; London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 200-206 (on Ps 9/10 specifically); J. Leveen, “Psalm X: A Reconstruction,” *JTS* 45 (1944): 16-21 and Patrick W. Skehan, “A Broken Acrostic and Psalm 9,” *JBL* 27 (1965): 5.

<sup>5</sup> David N. Freedman, “Acrostics and Metrics in Hebrew Poetry,” *HTR* 65 (1972): 367-92 and “Acrostic Poems in the Hebrew Bible: Alphabetic and Otherwise,” *CBQ* 48 (1986): 408-31.

9/10 and 37 and between Pss 25 and 34.<sup>6</sup> He specifically notes matching line lengths in these paired psalms. For example, Pss 9/10 and 37 both contain two line, four cola alphabetic units while Pss 25 and 34 both contain one line, two cola alphabetic units.<sup>7</sup> Thus Freedman’s focus is on the technical aspects of the acrostics: meter, length of cola and syllable counts. He does say, however, that his study of structure “provides the foundation for further consideration of the psalms’ theology and poetics.”<sup>8</sup>

Freedman’s observation leads to the particular focus of this project—an investigation of the occurrences and functions of various poetic devices in the four alphabetic acrostic psalms of Book I and how these devices function theologically within each individual psalm and within these four psalms as a distinct group. The majority scholarly opinion (with a few dissenters) has been that these acrostics are deficient with respect to *logical* sequence or development of content. This fact has been attributed to the writers’/editors’ preoccupation with the alphabetic pattern. A representative of this position is S. Mowinckel:

In a late psalm like Ps 119 prayer and lament and hymnal motives so intermingle as to make the interpreters feel at a loss with regard to the character and purpose of the psalm. When a psalm was tied down to an artificial ‘alphabetic’ pattern—that is to say, every line or stanza starting with a new letter according to the sequence of the alphabet—it very often resulted in a rambling and obscure train of thought and a loose composition.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> David N. Freedman, with Jeffrey C. Geoghegan, and Andrew Welch, *Psalm 119: The Exaltation of Torah* (BJS 6; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 2-3.

<sup>7</sup> Freedman, et al., *Psalm 119*.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, vii.

<sup>9</sup> Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship* (2 vols.; trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas; New York: Abingdon, 1967), 2:77-78; K. C. Hanson, “Alphabetic Acrostics: A Form Critical Study” (Ph.D. diss., The Claremont Graduate School, 1984), with reference

While Mowinckel specifically names the lengthy alphabetic acrostic (Ps 119), his opinion about the alphabetic structure would also apply to the other seven acrostics in the Psalter. In this study I will not argue that these four acrostic psalms *are* “logical” in their development of themes. Also, I do recognize that other non-acrostic psalms evidence a more logical development of theme. My focus is rather on certain poetic devices, on poetic intricacies, on poetical development, and on aesthetic features within each of these four acrostics *rather* than upon the logical development<sup>10</sup> of theological/literary themes.

Another often expressed opinion is that these poems are less “inspired”; that is, lacking in creativity or expressiveness—due to their obsession with the alphabetic pattern. These psalms are thought to be stiff, wooden and “unimaginative.” Again, this claim is found in S. Mowinckel who speaks of a “disintegration of style” and says “this

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to Ps 9/10, speaks of a “meandering style” and then says: “the irritating style . . . is compounded by the irregular shifting back and forth between second and third person address of the deity . . . This shifting has a confusing effect upon the form and coherence of the poem” (21); Hermann Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926), 511 (comment on Ps 119: *content* is sacrificed to meet the demands of the acrostic form); Edward J. Kissane, *The Book of Psalms* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1953), 36, 110, 162; Artur Weiser, *The Psalms* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962) in connection with Pss 37 and 119 (315 and 739 respectively); W.O.E. Oesterley, *The Psalms* (London: S.P.C.K., 1939), 189; and Michael D. Coogan, ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical Books* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) in its annotations on Pss 9/10; 25; and 37 consistently makes comments about lack of logical sequencing or logical progression of thought due to the acrostic form.

<sup>10</sup> On the whole question of “logical development” in relation to biblical and other ancient poetries, consider the following observation: “The thinking expressed in primitive songs is also different from our thinking; it moves more by association of symbols and images than by *development of ideas*. Primitive songs allow societies to express and answer their most basic questions, enable them to pursue action with confidence and bring them into touch with gods and spirits” in Joseph P. Strelka, “Anthropology and Poetry,” in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (ed. Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan; Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 77.

[disintegration] is particularly marked in the alphabetic psalms, in which every line or period (‘bicolon’, ‘distich’) starts with a successive letter in alphabetic sequence.”<sup>11</sup>

This claim, however, has been challenged through the years.<sup>12</sup>

There have been scholarly identifications of rhetorical devices and efforts at cataloguing poetic devices in these particular psalms.<sup>13</sup> And yet, an examination of the history of psalms research reveals that there has not been an investigation focused exclusively on the *functions* of these poetic devices in these four psalms.

### *History of Research*

In his erudite survey of biblical poetical parallelism (and its history), James Kugel<sup>14</sup> provides a comprehensive history of the concept of Hebrew poetry down through the

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<sup>11</sup> Mowinckel, *Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 2:111.

<sup>12</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms* (2d ed.; rev. and trans. Francis Bolton; 3 vols.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1871), 1:161; Bittenweiser, *Psalms*, 431 speaks of the author of Ps 9/10 as a “poet of unusual skill.” Cf. his comment on the skill of the Ps 25 poet (810); Hanson, “Alphabetic Acrostics,” 9, 28, 103, 431; Cf. Norman K. Gottwald, *Studies in the Book of Lamentations* (London: SCM Press, 1954), 23-32. Gottwald regards the acrostic structure in a positive light—as the mark of “an artist of first rank” (32); Will Soll, *Psalm 119: Matrix, Form, and Setting* (CBQMS 23; Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association, 1991), 23-31; and Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (ed. Patrick D. Miller; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1995), 221-32, 237-43, details the poetic and rhetorical intricacies of Pss 9/10 and 37 (221-32, 237-43; see especially the comment on 243). See also Erhard Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations* (FOTL XV; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 271.

<sup>13</sup> Brueggemann, *Psalms and Life*, 223-32, 237-43; Löhr, “Alphabetische und alphabetisierende,” 186-91; Hanson, “Alphabetic Acrostics,” 22-36, 56-64; Soll, *Psalm 119*, 35-45; Lisa Wilson Davison, “‘Your Word is a Lamp Unto My Feet’: A Study of the Vocabulary, Grammar, and Semantics of Psalm 119” (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1999), 50-69.

<sup>14</sup> James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Hebrew Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981), 96-286.

ages. The following brief history of research into the scholarly investigation of the acrostic psalms is not meant to repeat the pertinent information provided by Kugel. He occasionally discusses comments regarding alphabetic or acrostic patterns found in certain psalms and in the book of Lamentations. It is appropriate, however, to give more detailed attention than does Kugel to the following literature: to early Jewish, rabbinical, early Christian, and to medieval Jewish comments regarding the alphabetic acrostics in the book of Psalms. It is also helpful to begin with an appreciation for these early writers' thinking about Hebrew poetry in general.<sup>15</sup> Hopefully, as this study progresses, such an approach will avoid the trap that Adele Berlin speaks of in her work on medieval Jewish interpretations of the poetry of the Hebrew Bible:

Modern biblical and literary scholars sometimes give the impression that they are the first to approach the Bible from a literary perspective, but in reality the literary study of the Bible is one of the most ancient methods of understanding the biblical text.<sup>16</sup>

*Philo of Alexandria*

The question arises as to where to begin such a survey. As Kugel points out, Philo of Alexandria was the first person “known to have described Hebrew writing in the terminology of Greek meters.”<sup>17</sup> While this study is not interested primarily in the question of the meter and/or parallelism of Hebrew poetry (Kugel's main concern), it should be noted that Philo *did* recognize the poetic quality of the Hebrew Bible's psalms

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<sup>15</sup> In what follows I am heavily dependent upon Kugel's 1981 work, for his insights and especially his bibliography.

<sup>16</sup> Adele Berlin, *Biblical Poetry through Medieval Jewish Eyes* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 3.

<sup>17</sup> Kugel, *Idea*, 135.

and hymns. This recognition separates Philo from the rabbinical scholars who were so concerned to preserve the sacred, divine character of the Hebrew Bible (“Scripture”) that they basically denied its poetic or rhetorical qualities.<sup>18</sup> Kugel discusses the references in Philo’s *On the Contemplative Life* and in his *On the Life of Moses* in which Philo describes Hebrew poetry as being composed in hexameters, trimeters and “choruses, admirably measured out in various and well diversified strophes.”<sup>19</sup> In another reference from the *Contemplative Life*, Philo also describes the hymns sung by the Therapeutae choruses in terms of “many meters and tunes” and “strophes and antistrophes.”<sup>20</sup> Finally, Philo makes several references to the song by Moses in Exodus 15 which he sometimes refers to as a song or a hymn<sup>21</sup> and to the song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Kugel, *Idea*: “For the basic assumption underlying all of rabbinic exegesis is that the slightest details of the biblical text have a meaning that is both comprehensible and significant. Nothing in the Bible, in other words, ought to be explained as the product of chance, or, for that matter, as an emphatic or rhetorical form, or anything similar . . . Significantly, the Greek *poietai* appears in only a handful of rabbinic texts, and there without any indication that poetry is to be found in the Bible; at best, only the use of alphabetic acrostics bespoke the sort of structural arrangement that might be compared to a poet’s work” (104, 129-30).

<sup>19</sup> Philo, *Contempl. Life* 10.80. See also *Contempl. Life* 3.29.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.84.

<sup>21</sup> Philo, *Agriculture* 17.81-18.82; *Dreams* 2,41.269; *Sobriety* 29.111; *Moses* 2,46.256-257. In this last text, Philo goes into detail: the group was divided into two choruses (male and female) by Moses; Moses led the male chorus and Miriam the female chorus; the combining of the deep male voices with the high-toned female voices brought about a “delightful and thoroughly harmonious melody”; Moses began the song and the others followed his lead “taking the words that he uttered.”

<sup>22</sup> Philo, *Names* 34.182; *Sobriety* 3.10; *Worse* 30.114; *Posterity* 35.121; *Alleg. Interp.* 3,34.105; *Dreams* 2,29.191.

Again, what is important to note here is the fact that Philo values the poetical and aesthetic beauty of biblical hymnody, specifically in the case of the songs attributed to Moses. All of these references, even though they do not specifically refer to meter or rhythm (and of course, not to specific devices, like the acrostic pattern), should be read against the backdrop of Philo's comments in *De vita Mosis* about Moses' early musical training in the royal court of Egypt:

Accordingly he speedily learnt arithmetic, and geometry, and the whole science of rhythm and harmony and metre, and the whole of music, by means of the use of musical instruments, and by lectures on the different arts, and by explanation of each topic . . . and the philosophers from the adjacent countries taught him Assyrian literature.<sup>23</sup>

#### *Josephus, Origen, and Jerome*

Josephus also, in contrast to the rabbis, evidences a knowledge of and an appreciation for the poetic complexity of Hebrew hymnody. Nevertheless, he does not refer specifically to any of the psalms. What he does refer to is David's skill in composing songs and hymns to God in "varied meters—some he made in trimeters, and others in pentameters."<sup>24</sup> Similar to Philo, Josephus does not comment on poetic devices and does not even comment on the meter of specific psalms in the Psalter. He does, nevertheless, recognize that biblical songs and hymns are structured poetically although he does not evidence as strong an appreciation for aesthetics as does Philo.

Moving on to the church fathers, Origen also recognizes the metrical structure of Ps 119. Origen says the Psalms are in trimeter and tetrameter. But the point here is to

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<sup>23</sup> Philo, *Moses* 1,5.23.

<sup>24</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 7.305. Josephus also *briefly* comments on the meter of the songs of Moses in Exodus 15 and Deuteronomy 32 (see *Ant.* 2.346 and 4.303 respectively).

notice that he recognizes the poetic structure of the psalms. He also comments briefly on the alphabetic acrostic patterns in Pss 111 and 112.<sup>25</sup> There is, however, no speculation as to the *meaning* of the poetic form much less any comment on other poetical structures or devices.

In Jerome's writings, there is also an appreciation for the poetic structure and aesthetic beauty of biblical psalmody in the Psalter, the books of Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Solomon, and Job.<sup>26</sup> In Jerome's homily on Ps 9 he surprisingly does not comment on the alphabetic acrostic pattern found in Pss 9/10, but rather spends all of his energy discussing the title of the psalm. He does, however, say that Ps 9 is "grand in its poetry."<sup>27</sup>

Jerome did not write a homily on Pss 10, 25, 34 or 37. But in commenting on Pss 111, 112, and 119, he does note the alphabetic arrangement found in these songs.<sup>28</sup> He also makes the following statement regarding Ps 119 that implies that the alphabetic structure is somehow related to the "moral" meaning of the song (perhaps the idea of "completeness"?). Jerome writes:

It begins with ALEPH and goes on down to the last Hebrew letter THAU, with successive letters of the alphabet. There are twenty-two Hebrew letters, and the verses are composed in octaves corresponding to the letters of the alphabet . . . Thus, [Psalm 119] is alphabetic in structure. Now, if we intended to read a letter, we cannot understand the Scriptures without first knowing the

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<sup>25</sup> Origen, *Selecta in Psalmos* (PG 12:1585).

<sup>26</sup> Jerome, *Interpretatio Chronicae Eusebii Pamphili* (PL 27:36).

<sup>27</sup> Jerome, *Homily 4: On Psalm 9: 9A, 9B* (FC 48:35).

<sup>28</sup> Jerome, *Homily 38: On Psalm 111 (112)* (FC 48:281); *Homily 41: On Psalm 119 (120)* (FC 48:300).

alphabet. [Psalm 119], then, is alphabetic in form and moral in character and contains instruction for our life.<sup>29</sup>

### *Cassiodorus*

A great admirer of Jerome and a commentator who relies upon Jerome's knowledge of Hebrew is Cassiodorus, who in the sixth century composed an extensive commentary on the Psalter.<sup>30</sup> Although Cassiodorus works in Latin, he evidently made use of Jerome's Hebrew Psalter in which Jerome corrected (based on the Hebrew text) his earlier translations from the Septuagint.<sup>31</sup> Cassiodorus is also heavily influenced by Cicero, Quintillian, and other rhetoricians, for as he works through each psalm in great detail he calls attention to countless rhetorical devices and figures of speech (for example, *ethopoeia*, *anadiplosis*, *emphasis/exaggeration*, *synecdoche*, *characterismos*, *phantasia*, *imaginatio*, *converse argumentum*, *paradigm*, *syllogism*, etc).

In response to the charge that the names of these tropes are not found in Scripture itself, Cassiodorus cites statements from "father Augustine," from Jerome, Ambrose, and Hilary that show these great theologians' recognition of these rhetorical devices in Scripture. Then Cassiodorus goes on to say that the tropes are "clearly found in force of meaning, not in the utterance of words."<sup>32</sup> In other words, his approach is descriptive of the phenomena found in the language of the psalms even if the psalms themselves or the other Scriptures do not label or classify the figures of speech used.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Cassiodorus, *Explanation of the Psalms* (trans. and annotated P. G. Walsh; 3 vols.; New York: Paulist, 1991).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 1:8.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 1:38-9.

This focus upon highlighting the use of various rhetorical and/or literary devices in the Psalms is to be seen against the background of Cassiodorus' emphasis on the overall "eloquence" of the Scriptures and of the Psalter in particular.<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, however, according to Cassiodorus these rhetorical devices are not the result of human eloquence or human skill. Rather, they are part of divine speech. At a much later time secular ("pagan") speakers and writers "transferred these techniques to the collections of arguments which the Greeks call topics, and to the arts of dialectic and rhetoric."<sup>34</sup>

Cassiodorus also provides several comments about the alphabetic acrostic psalms, seven of which he recognizes (Pss 25; 34; 37; 111; 112; 119; 145). In his section explaining each of these psalms, he goes section by section, laying out the sections according to their particular letter of the Hebrew alphabet ("ALEPH . . . BETH . . . GHIMEL . . ." etc). This seven-time repeated alphabetic pattern does not seem to strike Cassiodorus as a rhetorical device, but he does offer several observations about the purpose of the pattern. He recognizes two different types of alphabetic poem: those containing the whole alphabet and those that (purposely) delete certain letters. Cassiodorus reads theological meaning into this difference. He believes the first type symbolizes *perfection* or completeness by means of including the entire alphabet ("they just sing the Lord's praises by His kindness through the perfect devotion of their

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<sup>33</sup> He begins and ends his psalms commentary with this focus. See Cassiodorus, *Psalms* 1:36-40 ("The Eloquence of the Entire Divine Law"); 1:40-41 ("The Particular Eloquence of the Psalter"); and 3:465 (" . . . we have shown that the series of psalms is crammed with points of grammar, etymologies, figures, rhetoric, topics, dialectic. . .").

<sup>34</sup> Cassiodorus, *Psalms*, 1:38.

meritorious deeds”).<sup>35</sup> The second types’ deletion of letters signifies that there “are men singing in the Church on whom good works in their entirety do not smile to the same degree”; that is, those among the believers who “cannot sing the Lord’s praises with the fullest purity of good works.”<sup>36</sup>

Finally, therefore, the alphabetic acrostic pattern in Cassiodorus’ thinking primarily signifies perfection or completeness. This perfection is not, however, completeness in the same way argued by N. Gottwald<sup>37</sup> and others. Rather, Cassiodorus sees here not mere literary or theological completeness but a message of *moral* completeness or perfection (which comes, of course, “by [God’s] kindness”). Furthermore, Cassiodorus never hints that the acrostic psalms are somehow lacking in “eloquence” or in logical sequence when compared to the other psalms. Of course, one would not expect such a distinction since for Cassiodorus the words of scripture—including the rhetorical tropes—come from a divine source. One last observation is in order. Cassiodorus simply notes each rhetorical device and gives a brief definition. He does not specifically comment on how the particular trope advances or enriches the theological message of its psalm. His study is therefore the ancestor of later form-critical descriptions of psalmic

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 1:246-7.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 1:247, 325. Cf. 1:357.

<sup>37</sup> Gottwald, *Lamentations*, 28-32. See also Soll, *Psalms 119*, 27: “Symbolically, by taking the [acrostic] prayer through the alphabet, a sense of completeness is evoked without having to be comprehensive.” Compare Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:161 who says of the acrostic pattern: “The lyric writer regards it as the keys on which he strikes every note, in order to give the *fullest expression* to his feelings” [italics added]. See also Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50* (WBC 19; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983) who lists the connotation of “completeness” as important, but who believes the fundamental purpose of the acrostic pattern was to serve as “an artistic device which provided the poet with a distinctive framework within which to express his thought” (129).

rhetorical/literary devices that simply list occurrences of significant features without discussing their effect on auditors/readers or discussing their advancement of the psalm's message.

*Azariah de' Rossi*

Before moving on to consider Bishop Robert Lowth's famous treatise on Hebrew poetry, it is appropriate to consider one of the Jewish writers who influenced Lowth's work—Azariah de' Rossi and his famous *Me'or Enayim*,<sup>38</sup> written in the sixteenth century. De' Rossi himself provides an overview of this book in his introduction: he will first deal with the earthquakes that devastated his city and then provides a translation of the Letter of Aristeas. Next, his final (and largest) section is entitled “Words of Understanding.” It is this last section that contains De' Rossi's thoughts on Hebrew poetry and his few comments about the alphabetic acrostic pattern.

De' Rossi (also often referred to as Rabbi Azariah) first comments on the alphabetic pattern in connection with the printing of Ps 145. He simply observes that some Christian translators [printers] of his time had “decided to arrange the verses according to letters and numbers to ensure that the structure of the Holy Scripture which we possess would be retained.” He continues, “In their version for Psalm 145 [which follows alphabetical order], they relegated the verse *God is faithful in all words and upright in all His deeds* to the letter *nun*.”<sup>39</sup> This particular verse actually begins with a *samek*, the *nun*

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<sup>38</sup> The references and quotations that follow come from the recent annotated translation: Azariah de' Rossi, *The Light of the Eyes* (trans. Joanna Weinberg; New Haven: Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

line being absent as De' Rossi points out. He goes on to explain that certain rabbis argue in cases such as this that the missing line (“verse”) will be said at a future time, namely, at the “time of redemption” or the end time.<sup>40</sup>

De' Rossi says nothing more about the alphabetic acrostics specifically. Even in his reference to Ps 119, he makes no mention of the alphabetic structure of this psalm. And not even in his discussion of Lamentations does he refer to the alphabetic pattern found there, but rather focuses all his attention on the debate over meter.<sup>41</sup> He does, however, write a considerable amount about the antiquity of the “holy tongue” (the Hebrew language) and its letters, vowels, and accents. His attention to the antiquity of the Hebrew letters is a reminder of the symbolic (or better, “divine”) significance of the alphabet in the rabbinic tradition. He first asserts that the fact that when the Genesis narratives are translated into other languages, those languages preserve the “Hebrew form” of the names “Adam,” “Cain,” and “Noah.” This fact is proof positive that the first (original) human language was Hebrew.<sup>42</sup>

In his next chapter, De' Rossi repeats the rabbinic position that even the letters of the Hebrew language date back to the creation of Adam. He then, in his established pattern, turns to consider the other side of the question—whether or not these ancient letters are the same as the letters used to write the Torah at Mt. Sinai or a different form of the letters (an ancient controversy). One gets the impression that de' Rossi does not consider this problem to be a seriously important issue. He concludes: “for my part, all

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 171-2.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 715-16.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 673.

this [the proposed solutions] does not satisfy me. Let this bewilderment remain until Elijah comes or when the dust will be removed from the eyes of those sages at the time of the resurrection of our dead.”<sup>43</sup>

Finally, the sixtieth chapter of de’ Rossi’s “Words of Understanding” section is the chapter most concerned with Hebrew poetics. He expresses an awareness of the contention of Philo, Josephus, Origen, and Jerome that Hebrew poetry is written in meter, but is dissatisfied with this approach. He says:

My heart told me that the songs of holy Scripture do undoubtedly have measures and structures, but that they do not depend on the number of long or short vowels, as is the norm with poems of our own times . . . Rather, their structure and measures consist in the number of ideas and their parts, subject and predicate.<sup>44</sup>

De’ Rossi cites several examples from Exod 15, Deut 32, Num 21, and Hab 3 by which he demonstrates there is a recurrent pattern of three ideas/concepts followed by three ideas/concepts or sometimes two ideas followed by two ideas.<sup>45</sup> What is most interesting for this study is the emphasis that de’ Rossi’s approach places upon the concepts or ideas represented by the words that are being counted. Granted, counting syllables or vowels (long versus short) involves close reading. But one wonders if this approach might not tend to obscure the power and the aesthetics and the theological message of the poems. In contrast, de’ Rossi’s counting of expressed ideas/concepts naturally would lead to more attention paid to the poetical language and (potentially) to its expression of a

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 698.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 712-3.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 713-14.

theological message. He in fact ends his discussion of Hebrew poetry with an emphasis upon content versus metrical rules:

The principle we have reached is as follows. The poems based on rhythm with feet and quantities, numbered according to rules, are not truly congruent with the nature of our language. The sage of the *Kuzari* was right to say that they are antithetical to its supreme character. For generally they move when there should be a pause, and pause when there should be movement; they separate that which should be connected and connect that which is separate . . . But the poems that suit [our language] are those which preserve their harmonies by means of the content as is shown by the words of the prophets that we mentioned.<sup>46</sup>

*John Calvin*

Also in the sixteenth century, one should note the observations of John Calvin. Calvin's expertise and insight as an exegete and a commentator are well known and his five volume commentary on the Psalter is truly a classic. While Calvin does not deal with the alphabetic acrostics as a whole, he does have some comments to make about the pattern in connection with the specific acrostic psalms. And yet, he does not make such comments on the acrostic poems of Book I. Apparently he does not consider these psalms to be acrostics.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, Calvin does recognize the acrostic pattern in Pss 111 and 119.<sup>48</sup> In connection with the question of the authorship of Ps 119, he admits this question cannot be answered with certainty but says he will occasionally insert David's name as author since David "surpassed all others in point of poetical . . .

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 719.

<sup>47</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (trans. James Anderson; 5 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), vols 1 and 2 (see specific psalms).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 4:310-17, 339-494; 5:1-51.

talent.”<sup>49</sup> Finally, as to the purpose of the alphabetical pattern, Calvin says it was to aid the memory.<sup>50</sup> Like the medieval rabbis, Calvin does not give attention to questions of poetry or stylistics in his commentary on the Psalter.

*Robert Lowth*

In his famous lectures on Hebrew poetry, Robert Lowth does make many observations about the poetic and aesthetic qualities of Hebrew poetry (including the Psalms) even though his work is best remembered for his classification of three major types of parallelism.<sup>51</sup> Lowth defends the importance of poetry in general (in comparison to philosophy) by claiming that while both lead to the same destination (Virtue and Truth), poetry appeals to Reason *and* the passions. In contrast, philosophy appeals only to Reason in its pursuit of Truth and so poetry takes a “winding, but pleasanter path.”<sup>52</sup> He also praises “sacred poetry” as the most sublime type of poetry since, he argues, “subservience to Religion . . . appears to have been the original office and destination of Poetry.”<sup>53</sup> Of course, his prime example is Hebrew poetry which he describes as the most “elevated,” and “beautiful,” and “elegant” of all poetry.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 4:399-400.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 4:399. See also found in Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms I* (AB 16; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965), 54 and Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59* (CC; trans. Hilton C. Oswald; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1988), 38.

<sup>51</sup> Robert Lowth, *Lectures on Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* (2d ed.; trans. G. Gregory; 2 vols.; London: J. Johnson, 1787).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 1:7-8.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 1:36.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 1:37.

There are many more places in Lowth's work where he sings the praises of Hebrew poetry, both within and outside of the Psalter. He does, however, resist the methodology that would seek to apply Greek rhetorical designations to Hebrew poetic devices because, he says, the rhetoricians' terms are "almost innumerable" and "our present concern is not to explain the sentiments of the Greek but of the Hebrew writers."<sup>55</sup> He thus restricts himself to the rhetorical terms: metaphor, allegory, personification, and simile.

The main interest for this study is Lowth's brief comments about the alphabetic acrostic pattern. Most of these comments appear in passing and Lowth does not entertain the idea that this pattern possesses theological or rhetorical significance. His understanding is that the alphabetic form is intended merely to aid memorization:

There existed a certain kind of poetry among the Hebrews, principally intended, it should seem, for the assistance of the memory: in which, when there was little connection between the sentiments, a sort of order or method was preserved, by the initial letters of each line or stanza following the order of the alphabet. Of this there are several examples extant among the sacred poems [Pss 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145, Prov. 31 from the 10<sup>th</sup> verse to the end. The whole of the Lamentations of Jeremiah except the last chapter].<sup>56</sup>

In this quotation, one can see that Lowth views the acrostic psalms as lacking in "order" or "connection between the sentiments" (i.e., lacking in logical development or progression of thought). This assertion is a claim about the acrostics that will resurface

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 1:105-6. No doubt lying behind Lowth's aversion to most Greek rhetorical terms is the fear of "reductionism" and a belief that one can (and should!) respect a strict dichotomy between things Hebrew and things Greek. This false dichotomy was held to in scholarship long after Lowth. In contrast, see Ze'ev Weisman's defense of the use of a particular literary designation (satire), which originated in classical Roman literature, to *describe* phenomena in the Hebrew Bible. See Weisman, *Political Satire in the Bible* (SBLSup 32; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 1-4. For Lowth's general praises of the aesthetics of Hebrew poetry, see for example the following references from his *Lectures*: 1:167, 293, 308, 311-13, 365-67; 2:156.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 1:57. Cf. 2:134.

time and time again in the history of scholarship. In a footnote of this second (annotated) addition of Lowth's work, there is a comment attributed to M. Michaelis to the effect that "except (for) the Lamentations and the 37<sup>th</sup> Psalm, none of the alphabetic poems of the Hebrews rise in any degree above mediocrity."<sup>57</sup> And yet, Lowth's own comments on the aesthetic or literary power of the acrostics are not so negative. He says that the alphabetical psalms belong to classification of didactic writings (along with Qoheleth). And he is not very complimentary about the poetry of Qoheleth calling it "generally low" and almost "vulgar" (or "mean"). But then, right after he places the acrostic psalms in this category, he says of these poems:

The chief commendation of these poems is that they are excellently accommodated to ordinary use; that the sentiments are serious, devout, and practical; the language chaste and perspicuous; the composition neat, and regularly adapted to the sententious form.<sup>58</sup>

Bishop Lowth goes on to say that this alphabetic arrangement appeals not to the ear but to the eye:

. . . and in these examples the verses are so exactly marked and defined, that it is impossible to mistake them for prose; and particularly if we attentively consider the verses and compare them with one another, since they are in general so regularly accommodated, that word answers to word, and almost syllable to syllable. This being the case, though an appeal can scarcely be made to the ear on this occasion, the eye itself will distinguish the poetic division and arrangement, and also that some labour and accuracy has been employed in adapting the words to the measure.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 2:134, n. 13.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 2:175-6.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 1:57-8. See also H. Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel* (completed Joachim Begrich; trans. James D. Nogalski; Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1998), 128; and Soll, *Psalms 119*, 21.

*Modern Commentators*

Delitzsch follows Lowth's focus on the beauty and the mechanics of Hebrew poetry in the Psalter. He comments briefly on the assonance caused by the "heaping up of similar flexional endings" and considered this to be an "attempt at rhyme" and he also thinks there is an attempt made at some kind of a consistent meter.<sup>60</sup> When he actually comments on the acrostic psalms, Delitzsch is diligent to reflect the acrostic pattern in the margin of his translation of the Hebrew text. Nevertheless, his main concern throughout is to maintain the Davidic authorship of the acrostics that name David in the superscript. On Pss 9-10, for example, he says:

Even Hitzig does not allow himself to be misled as to the ancient Davidic origin of Ps ix. and x. by the fact of their having an alphabetic arrangement. These two Psalms have the honour of being ranked among the thirteen Psalms which are acknowledged by him to be genuine Davidic Psalms. Thus, therefore, the alphabetical arrangement found in other Psalms cannot, in itself, bring us down to "the times of poetic trifling and degenerated taste."<sup>61</sup>

Delitzsch interprets the acrostic pattern in Pss 9/10 as evidence of the fact that even the historical David was "given to acrostic composition."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:23-24. He discusses at length the whole issue of meter (23-30). In this section, he discusses the usefulness of the acrostics in defining line length. He also mentions the rhetorical device *chiasmus* without, however, commenting on its function poetically (30).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* He goes on to say that the acrostic pattern is not "a paltry substitute for the departed poetic spirit, not merely an accessory to please the eye, an outward embellishment – it is itself indicative of mental power" (161).

William Binnie also continued the focus on the aesthetic beauty of the Hebrew Psalter and also commented on the structure of the alphabetic acrostic psalms.<sup>63</sup> Binnie re-emphasized the similarity of ideas as the basis of Hebrew verse—rather than any kind of rhyme or meter. He says:

The point that claims special attention in this kind of versification is the relation subsisting between the several lines. In other poetry, the relation of the successive lines lies essentially in the harmony of the words; here it lies in the harmony of the ideas. The relation is in the sense, not in the sound; it is not *verbal*, but *real*, a relation not of *words* but of *things*.<sup>64</sup>

Specifically on the acrostic psalms, he made several observations. First, he counts nine acrostics—considering Pss 9 and 10 as separate poems although in the footnote he recognizes that the “very imperfect alphabetic arrangement” serves to unite the poems. Second, he feels strongly that the acrostic pattern, which he calls a “remarkable style of composition,” should be indicated in the English versions of all nine poems and not just Ps 119.<sup>65</sup> Binnie actually produces a translation of Pss 111, 112, 119 (partial) and 37 (partial) in which he omits four English alphabetical letters and proceeds with a reproduction of the acrostic pattern using the remaining twenty-two letters.<sup>66</sup> Third, he appears to question the poetic beauty of the 119<sup>th</sup> Psalm when he says: “In such a psalm, it is sententious wisdom rather than high poetry that we look for; and a better vehicle for the aphorisms of sententious wisdom could hardly be imagined than that which is

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<sup>63</sup> William Binnie, *The Psalms: Their History, Teachings, and Use* (rev. and enl.; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1886), especially pp. 136-51.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 142-48.

furnished by this acrostic.”<sup>67</sup> And yet, Binnie rejects the claim made by other commentators that Ps 119 is monotonous or impoverished in thought. Finally, the acrostics are important because they show that Hebrew poetry was conscious of lines and structure—based not, however, on words but on thoughts or ideas (content).<sup>68</sup>

In the early twentieth century, before the watershed works by H. Gunkel, Max Löhr critically examined the alphabetic acrostics in the Hebrew Psalter and made several astute observations in connection with these psalms. First, he provides a comprehensive list of the initial words encountered in the eight acrostic psalms plus the other biblical acrostic poems (Nah 1; Lam 1-4; Prov 31:10-31 and Sir 51:13-30).<sup>69</sup> Löhr, however, does not delve into the *function* of these initial words in the individual poems. In fact, he says:

For our investigation an overview of the available alphabetical beginnings is indispensable. Merx . . . says: “It is absolutely unreasoning, in the case of these simple alphabetical songs, to speak of art; but a Hebrew would be so experienced in his mother tongue that he effortlessly finds a suitable starting word for each strophe according to the alphabetical sequence.”<sup>70</sup>

Second, Löhr speculates as to the historical settings and dates of the biblical acrostics.

This concern with dating and with the “chronological sequence” of the poems is Löhr’s main focus. Finally then, he turns his attention to the question of the purpose of the

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 143. Cf. 150. Later, he seems hesitant to admit that Ps 119 is deficient in poetic style. He writes: “Its [Ps 119] two-and-twenty clusters yield the wine of the kingdom as copiously as any to be found in all the Bible. The remark applies, although in a somewhat lower degree, to several other alphabetical psalms [Pss 25, 34, 37]. If inferior to many others in poetical embellishment, they are inferior to none in the variety and richness of the aliment they minister to devout meditation” (145).

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 147, 150.

<sup>69</sup> Löhr, “Alphabetische und alphabetisierende,” 186-90.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 186 [my translation].

acrostic form. This question, he says, must remain open (unanswered) although he does have an opinion about the effect of the acrostic pattern. He says: “The acrostic form [eventually, with time] becomes artificial and a definite number of words becomes especially popular for the alphabetical beginnings.”<sup>71</sup>

Rudolf Kittel’s commentary of 1914 is also important for this survey. Kittel drafts several excurses on important topics as he works his way through the Psalter. One such brief excursus addresses the question of the rationale behind the alphabetic acrostics. He acknowledges the obvious function of the acrostic pattern—to display the poetic art of the psalmist.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, he does not believe that is the primary function. Instead, the acrostic pattern was used by the psalmists because of the magical connotations associated with the alphabet in antiquity. He says:

Finally, probably the origin of the acrostic in magical practice, however, has already been forgotten—the attaching of value to letters as such and in addition their fitting together of certain words, for example, sacred names. To the ancient Israelites the invention of the alphabetic script still lies near enough, so that the memory of the time when one had to make do without them had still not been lost.<sup>73</sup>

This explanation continued to be a common interpretation of the alphabetic pattern.

In 1936, P. A. Munch writes another significant investigation of the dating, the origin, and the purpose of the form. Munch argues that the form is postexilic and that it originates in the wisdom schools as a way to inculcate piety while at the same time

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 197 [my translation].

<sup>72</sup> Rudolf Kittel, *Die Psalmen: übersetzt und erklärt* (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1914), 32.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. [my translation].

instructing students in the art of writing.<sup>74</sup> His main focus is upon the utilitarian use of the acrostic as a writing exercise to teach the letters of the alphabet while at the same time teaching the poetic art:

The alphabetic psalms are compiled patterns for the teaching of writing so that the alphabet and good writing would be learned through the copying. One can hardly think of a better pedagogical method to serve this purpose; for example, when one copied Ps 119, in which every letter of the alphabet is repeated at the beginning of a line eight times.<sup>75</sup>

He does, however, (in the last sentence of the article) entertain the “possibility” that the alphabetic acrostic had freed itself from teaching and had become an independent stylistic form.<sup>76</sup> But he does not focus at all upon the aesthetic or rhetorical aspects of the acrostic psalms.

Also in the early part of the twentieth century, I should mention the classic work of G. B. Gray.<sup>77</sup> Gray spends a considerable amount of time on biblical acrostics in his “survey” of poetic forms.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, Gray is more interested in parallelism (refining

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<sup>74</sup> P. A. Munch, “Die alphabetische Akrostichie in der jüdischen Psalmendichtung” *ZDMG* 90 (1936): 703, 708-10.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 709-10 [my translation].

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 710.

<sup>77</sup> George B. Gray, *The Forms of Hebrew Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1915; repr., New York: KTAV, 1972).

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 8, 244-95. The alphabetic acrostics provide a set, determined line and thus are an important tool for scholars interested in discovering the rules governing Hebrew meter. See Freedman, “Acrostics and Metrics,” 367-92 and Freedman’s *prolegomenon* to the reprint of Gray’s work (Gray, *Forms*, xxxvii-xxxix).

Lowth's classifications), in rhythm, and in meter than he is interested in the poetical devices and artistry of these poems.<sup>79</sup>

*Gunkel and Mowinckel*

As was noted earlier, Hermann Gunkel and his student Sigmund Mowinckel make some disparaging remarks about the poetic deficiencies of the acrostic psalms when compared with other poems. In contrast to W. Soll, who sees the alphabetic pattern in a positive light—even calling it a “reinforcement of the content of the poem”<sup>80</sup>—Gunkel and Mowinckel see the pattern as an extraneous element artificially imposed upon these psalms. Gunkel specifically speaks of a “superficial adornment of alphabetic order” that appears in poems that have been “pieced together like mosaics.”<sup>81</sup> On the continuum of Hebrew poetic skill, Gunkel places the book of Job on one end as the example of the “full height and splendor” of the wisdom poem and then the alphabetic acrostic psalms at the opposite, lower end of the spectrum of poetic art.<sup>82</sup>

Gunkel makes a few more comments about the acrostic pattern in his introduction to the Psalter. The first comments come again in the chapter on wisdom poetry in the

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<sup>79</sup> Gray, *Forms*, 37-40, 46-74, 87-240.

<sup>80</sup> Soll, *Psalms 119*, 25.

<sup>81</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, 294. A passage that illustrates his feeling that the alphabetic pattern is “superficial” is Gunkel’s comment on Ps 119 which he describes as “an alphabetic poem and therefore an *overly artistic* [italics added] poem in which the mixing reaches its height” (305). See also his *Die Psalmen: Übersetzt und erklärt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1929) where, in connection with Ps 9/10, Gunkel denies that the alphabetic pattern is to be explained by the intention of the poet or (“as many have maintained”) as a re-writing [revision] of the poem (32).

<sup>82</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, 294. Cf. Gunkel, *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction* (BS 19; trans. Thomas M. Horner; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 39.

psalms. He draws a distinction among the acrostic psalms between those that are bonafide “wisdom poems” (Pss 37; 112) and those that are “wisdom-influenced” poems (Pss 25; 34; and 119). Nevertheless, in either case, he says “the artistic *alphabetic form* . . . suggests a relatively late period.”<sup>83</sup> Gunkel’s main concern here (as in other places) is fixing a date for the various genres. Thus, for Gunkel the acrostic pattern is primarily an indicator of a late date of composition. Then in his chapter on mixed genres he dates Pss 9/10 and 119 as later than 500 BCE (postexilic) based upon their form. They are representative of the “dissolution of the genres and the blurring of their boundaries in connection to one another, which first occurred around 500.”<sup>84</sup> Of course, the alphabetic acrostics are not the only psalms that Gunkel places in this time of an “undeniable poverty of content” and loss of “lyrical richness.”<sup>85</sup> Gunkel’s presupposition that the main genres are ideal and totally distinct (“unmixed”, pure) is striking and has of course been challenged over the years.

Mowinckel’s disparaging comments about the alphabetic pattern are well known and were cited earlier in this study.<sup>86</sup> Although he touts the importance of the relationship between *form* and *content*, he apparently does not think of the alphabetic acrostic pattern as a *form*.<sup>87</sup> Mowinckel refuses to write a detailed (chronological) history of ancient

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<sup>83</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, 304. See also his comments on the legalistic spirit of Pss 37; 112; 119 as an indication of their place at the very end of the history of psalmody (305).

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 331.

<sup>86</sup> Mowinckel, *Psalms in Israel’s Worship*, 2:77-78, 111. See pp. 3-4 above.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:25. Contrast Hanson, “Alphabetic Acrostics,” 409-10, 415-16, 431.

Israelite psalmography because of the lack of firm dates. The dates are most often relative and highly speculative.<sup>88</sup> His focus upon the acrostic psalms, however, is mostly concerned with issues of dating. There is here no focus on the poetic beauty of the form (the alphabetic pattern), nor on the poetics of the content, but rather speculation about the settings and the dates of these individual poems. Sometimes his statements send mixed signals. For example, in one place Pss 34 and 37 are described as originally cultic compositions and yet in another place they are listed among a handful of non-cultic psalms. All in all, Mowinckel would date the final form of the acrostic psalms (including presumably, Pss 9/10<sup>89</sup>) in the postexilic period.<sup>90</sup>

*Marcus, Crüsemann, and Freedman*

R. Marcus contributes to the ongoing search to classify the alphabetic acrostics according to genres and sub-genres and to discuss the various purpose(s) of the form.<sup>91</sup> Although Marcus assembles an impressive number of examples of alphabetic acrostics from biblical, apocryphal, mishnaic, Syriac, Greek and Latin texts, his main concern is form-critical, in other words, classificatory, and *not* poetic.

F. Crüsemann wrote an important and extensive form-critical analysis of “Hymnus” and “Danklied” psalms in 1969. This study by Crüsemann is definitely focused on defining more accurately the criteria by which hymns, individual thanksgiving songs, and

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<sup>88</sup> Mowinckel, *Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 2:156-8.

<sup>89</sup> In concert with commentators such as Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 193-4. Contrast, for example, Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 117 (cf. 129-30) and Soll, *Psalm 119*, 20.

<sup>90</sup> Mowinckel, *Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 1:95-6; 2:77-78, 111-14, 156-58.

<sup>91</sup> Ralph Marcus, “Alphabetic Acrostics in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods” *JNES* 6 (1947): 110-113.

communal thanksgiving songs are to be classified and sub-divided. He will accomplish this task by “methodically taking the text as (his) starting point” and focusing on each text’s “independence” and “clearly recognizable structure.”<sup>92</sup> But as Crüsemann continues, it becomes clear that his ultimate goal is to write an accurate history of the ancient Israelite hymn and to verify or confirm (from the texts) Gunkel’s identifying criteria of the hymn, the communal thanksgiving song, and the individual thanksgiving song.<sup>93</sup> Thus, his focus is not upon the aesthetic, poetic, or rhetorical aspects of the individual hymns and thanksgiving psalms but rather upon classification and (historical) setting in the life of ancient Israelite worship.

At the end of his study, in an excursus, Crüsemann does discuss the alphabetic acrostics specifically. First, he challenges a procrustean methodology of classification that places the alphabetic acrostics into the main, generally-recognized types (*Hauptgattungen*) in disregard of the individual, distinctive *content* of these psalms. For

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<sup>92</sup> Frank Crüsemann, *Studien zur Formgeschichte von Hymnus und Danklied in Israel* (Mainz: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969), 13. His approach is in line with that stated succinctly by S. Mowinckel: “The great majority of [the Psalms] are real cultic Psalms, composed for and used in the various situations within the public temple service of Israel . . . Only against the background of these fixed traditional rules of style shall we be quite able to understand and estimate the individual, personal, new features of any particular Psalm” in his “Psalm Criticism Between 1900 and 1935 (Ugarit and Psalm Exegesis)” *VT* 5 (1955): 16.

<sup>93</sup> Crüsemann, *Studien*, 13: “Damit kann die Aufgabe der vorliegenden Arbeit, . . . als eine *Nachprüfung der Gunkelschen Bestimmungen des Hymnus, des Dankliedes Israels und des Dankliedes des Einzelnen* bezeichnet werden. Beim Hymnus ist dabei vor allem die Frage zu stellen, ob sich hier verschiedene Formtypen eindeutig voneinander abheben lassen.” (“Thus, the task of the present work can be described . . . as a verification of Gunkel's definitions of the Hymns, the Thanksgiving Songs of Israel, and the Thanksgiving Songs of the Individual. In the case of the Hymns, it is to pose above all the question whether different form-types themselves allow a clear contrast with each other”) [my translation]. Later, Crüsemann will argue against a strict, airtight dichotomy between various forms. Instead, there was often a mixture of types.

example, of Ps 34 he says:

It became clear above that, for example, Ps 34 is certainly not to be explained from the individual thanksgiving song. Neither the double change in speech exhibits what are the constitutive formal characteristics of this type, nor does its introduction come from the thanksgiving song. There appeared a mixture of form with hymn and wisdom, one that far exceeds the customary degree for the thanksgiving song. This psalm is no thanksgiving song, and it is also not a hymn and not a wisdom song. It absolutely escapes classification into the usual (main) types.<sup>94</sup>

Thus Crüsemann puts forth the idea that in the acrostics there is a mixture of types and so one cannot legitimately place each of them into one of the main types established by form-critical analysis.

He goes on to argue that the acrostic pattern is a separate *Gattung*<sup>95</sup> and so these poems cannot be simply lumped into the main types (i.e., laments, hymns, thanksgiving songs, wisdom psalms, etc). Crüsemann's focus, however, is still primarily form-critical and historical and not literary or poetic. He places the movement towards the "mixture" of forms/types within the wisdom schools. His contention that the acrostic forms its own type (*Gattung*) is expanded and argued at length by Hanson.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 296 [my translation]. Gerstenberger (*Psalms, Pt. 1*), who makes reference to Crüsemann's work, says of Ps 9/10: "The two main parts of the poem, the Thanksgiving Song and the Complaint Song, use – within their alphabetic scheme – the components typical of the two genres. *At times, though, we may observe characteristic modification of the older forms* (73) [italics added]. In contrast to Crüsemann, who like many other scholars criticizes the acrostics as being artificial or for being a mixture of genres, Gerstenberger says the "differences between acrostics and traditional genre patterns are due mainly to the altered conditions of community life in late Israel" (121).

<sup>95</sup> Crüsemann, *Studien*, 297.

<sup>96</sup> Hanson, "Alphabetic Acrostics."

David N. Freedman has, of course, written extensively on Hebrew poetry and specifically on the acrostics.<sup>97</sup> As noted earlier, his focus on the acrostics is not to discover their poetics, but instead, he uses them as a tool to determine the average line length of an ancient Hebrew poem in his dogged search to define the rules of ancient Hebrew meter. At one point Freedman makes a statement that sounds as if he is attuned to the poetical artistry of the acrostic psalms:

Furthermore, the fact that acrostic poems have a rather rigid structure may have encouraged greater independence on the part of the poet in working out internal configurations so that a wider range of variation results, partly from the desire to avoid monotony, than would otherwise be the case.<sup>98</sup>

The focus here, however, is not on poetic or rhetorical “independence” but upon metrics. By means of counting syllables in the acrostics (and his resultant tables), he establishes the fact that the majority of biblical alphabetic acrostics have lines averaging approximately 16.5 syllables and then a smaller group of acrostics have shorter lines (averaging approximately 13-14 syllables).<sup>99</sup>

*Seybold, Hanson, Soll, and Davison*

In his engaging introduction to Psalms, Klaus Seybold makes several observations about poetic art in the Psalter and about the alphabetic acrostic poems in particular. First, in discussing the royal psalms and the dating of the wisdom psalms, which include the

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<sup>97</sup> David N. Freedman, *Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy: Studies in Early Hebrew Poetry* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1980). This volume is a convenient collection of articles and essays written by Freedman in the late 1960’s and in the 1970’s.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 76. This focus on structure and specifically meter continues in Freedman’s *Psalms 119*. He says this work lays the foundation for an investigation of the theology and the poetics of the biblical alphabetic acrostics (vii).

acrostics, Seybold concludes that there are in the Psalter “works of poetic art, composed by writers and singers who wished to be regarded and understood as artists.”<sup>100</sup> Then, in the context of a discussion of the origins of the psalms, Seybold addresses the textual structure of the eight acrostic poems and emphasizes that these psalms are still to be regarded as poetic art and as evidencing progression of thought:

It must be assumed that such texts were composed at the writing table. There hardly seems to be any other possibility than to imagine that the author began by setting down on paper the letters of the alphabet . . . in a vertical line. . . Thus far the process is rather mechanical and formal, and seems to stem from the literacy exercises of the school, where the pupils would write out the *Aleph-Beth* and memorize the sequence of the letters . . . Despite the constraints of the schema, the writer still has enough leeway to let his poetry unfold. Although the opening is predetermined, he can shape the rhythm of the individual verse freely . . . The writer can also attempt, in spite of the fixed openings which restrict the development of the poem, to express an objective train of thought, and at least to hint at a progression in content.<sup>101</sup>

He concludes that even though the acrostics are “artificial” in their construction and are more like “anthologies of proverbs” they can still function as prayers or hymns.<sup>102</sup>

Third, despite his praise of the potential artistic traits of the alphabetic acrostic psalms, Seybold does appear to conclude that they are stiff and mechanical. They are, however, extremely important to the study of the “systematic doctrine” of the Psalter because the alphabetic pattern presumably implies completeness or wholeness. Thus

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<sup>100</sup> Klaus Seybold, *Introducing the Psalms* (trans. R. Graeme Dunphy; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 47-8.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 43, 45.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 45. In his later discussion of the didactic trend traceable in many psalms, not just in wisdom psalms, Seybold makes the following comment about the acrostics: “the alphabetical poems seem to have come into the collections . . . as scholarly studies of proverbs, and as school exercises. It seems unlikely that they were ever presented aloud. However, as texts for meditation and reflection, like a chain of prayer in which one meditates one’s way through from A to Z . . . they may have enjoyed considerable popularity” (99).

these psalms are indirectly making a claim of “completeness” with respect to the proverbial-type sayings contained therein.<sup>103</sup> Finally, Seybold correctly points out that actually the acrostic psalms are not as “sophisticated” (mechanical or artistic, depending on one’s point of view) as other ancient Near Eastern name acrostics. The example he cites is the double, phrase acrostic form of the Akkadian *Prayer to Marduk and Nabu* in which “the opening syllables of the lines of both prayers, when read top to bottom” compose a sentence naming the author of the poem, while the *ends* of the lines read from top to bottom also produce descriptive sentences about the poet.<sup>104</sup>

K. C. Hanson also deals with all fourteen acrostics in the Hebrew Bible (as did Löhner) plus three other Jewish acrostic texts outside of the Psalter (namely, Ben Sira 51:13-30; 11 QPsa 155 and 11 QPsa Zion). While Hanson does give considerable attention to rhetorical devices, his main purpose is two-fold: first, to provide a comprehensive form-critical study of the alphabetic acrostics and second, to argue that “acrostic” should be a recognized psalmic genre.<sup>105</sup> Hanson’s insights regarding the rhetorical devices and the poetics of the four acrostics in Pss 3-41 will be discussed later in connection with the specific poems. He is very thorough in producing “lists” of keywords or catchwords and in highlighting the intricate rhetorical superstructures of these psalms. He is, however, primarily interested in form criticism and so does not

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 152. On the idea of the alphabetic pattern connoting completeness, recall Gottwald, *Lamentations*, 28-32.

<sup>104</sup> Seybold, *Introducing*, 200-1.

<sup>105</sup> Hanson, “Alphabetic Acrostics,” 12-14, 28-38, 408-16, 432-33. For Hanson, only seven of the seventeen (total) acrostics “constitute a literary genre: Pss 34, 37, 112, 119, Prov 31, Sir. 51 and ApZ” (431). For a critique of this conclusion, see Soll, *Psalm 119*, 5, n. 1.

delve as deeply into the *function* of the poetics. For example, in connection with Ps 9/10 Hanson assembles a lengthy list of keywords or phrases. He then says: “These repetitions bridge formal units, recall themes, and accentuate important concepts.”<sup>106</sup> This comment is intriguing, but he does not go on to state which units are “bridged,” which themes are recalled, or which concepts are highlighted. Hanson is mostly concerned with form critical questions, dating (historical setting) and the literary origins of the formulaic language and vocabulary used in these poems.

W. Soll’s detailed work on Ps 119 uses the rubric of a *matrix* to approach the two most notable stylistic features of this psalm—its acrostic pattern and its use of a Torah word in each verse. Soll likens these two features to the two axes of a graph. Although he refers to these features as “structural constraints,”<sup>107</sup> he is actually very positive about the function of the acrostic pattern and the repetitive nature of Ps 119 in the rest of the study. For example, he provides a survey of Babylonian acrostic poems and thus places Ps 119 and the other biblical acrostics in their literary milieu pointing out that Ps 119 is hardly the longest or most protracted acrostic poem from the ancient Near East.<sup>108</sup>

Throughout his study, Soll is very positive in his attitude towards the acrostic pattern in the biblical texts. He definitely sees the pattern not as “artificial” or a “disintegration of style,” but as one of the aesthetic tools used by the poet to craft his product.<sup>109</sup> After discussing the enumerative or repetitive tendency of biblical poetry, he says:

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<sup>106</sup> Hanson, “Alphabetic Acrostics,” 29.

<sup>107</sup> Soll, *Psalms 119*, 1, 55-56.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-11.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 6, 24. See especially 25-34.

The acrostic establishes an “abstract, unchanging pattern” which intersects with the aforementioned enumerative tendency of biblical poetry as a whole. Divine epithets, lament motives, petitions—in short, the stuff of religious poetry – can be piled on indefinitely. The acrostic form provides a structure, stimulus, and limit for this “enumeration.”<sup>110</sup>

In chapter four of his study, Soll challenges Gunkel’s classification of Ps 119 as a “mixed type.” He argues instead that the poem is coherent and the alphabetic pattern plays a role in this unity of meaning. As an example he cites the eight verses that make up the *aleph* strophe. Here, where Gunkel found mixed types (vv. 1-3, from wisdom; v. 4, hymnic in nature; vv. 5-6, individual lament, etc), Soll finds unity of message and genre. He says:

...the *Aleph* strophe emerges as having a definite logic as well as unity of theme and genre. While there may be less progression of thought in other strophes, they generally do display a comparable thematic and generic unity. Many of the strophes derive particular emphasis from the group of words associated with the initial alphabetic letter or from the place of that letter in the alphabetic sequence. *Thus their coherence is more readily observable when their place in the entire psalm is considered* [italics added].<sup>111</sup>

Although he focused on the classification of Ps 119 according to one of Gunkel’s types (specifically, an Individual Lament), Soll’s emphasis on aesthetics and on coherence is very attractive. His emphasis upon the poet’s use of the acrostic pattern and of repeated words to develop a unified theological statement is also quite appealing and causes one to wonder about aesthetics and coherence in other biblical acrostics.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 89-90. He likens the twenty-two, eight-fold strophes of the psalm to “paragraphs which stand in the same isolated yet interconnected relationship to one another as the individual lines in other psalms do” (90). Soll’s critique of Gunkel’s methodology echoes that of Schökel and Kessler: “Identification of the ‘form’ of a psalm should serve to advance understanding of an individual poem, and not to dissolve it in general categories” in L. Alonso Schökel and M. Kessler, “The Poetic Structure of Psalm 42-43,” *JSOT* 1 (1976): 4.

Lisa Wilson Davison's dissertation on Ps 119 makes very few comments about the alphabetic acrostic form. She simply says that out of eight psalmic acrostics, Ps 119 is obviously the most impressive. The only biblical acrostic that even comes close is Lam 3 with its twenty-two strophes of three lines each. Davison concludes: "Besides making the psalm impressive to the eye, this acrostic form lends a sense of discipline and order to the shape of Ps 119."<sup>112</sup> Therefore, she discounts the possibility that there are any aural aesthetics connected with the use of the acrostic form.<sup>113</sup>

### *Methodology*

This study will be primarily *descriptive*, consisting of a close reading of each of the four acrostics in Book I. Particular interest will be given to those studies that recognize the artistic, poetic, and rhetorical qualities of the acrostic psalms. The study will highlight the functions of the various poetic devices used. The devices considered will include grammatical and phonemic as well as (artistic) semantic components. The point will be to demonstrate the emotive power, the imaginative nature, and the creativity of this literature in contradiction to its supposedly stiff, wooden nature. The present study intends to steer a middle course between the efforts of Hanson, Soll and Davison—emphasizing the positive impact and importance of the acrostic pattern and focusing on more than one acrostic (i.e., all of the acrostics in a specific division of the five-fold Psalter) and yet, resisting the urge to classify the acrostics as to form. Instead, the focus of this study will be to emphasize the rhetorical and poetical structure of the first four

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<sup>112</sup> Davison, "Your Word is a Lamp," 11-12. Cf. Hanson, "Alphabetic Acrostics," 8-9, 433.

<sup>113</sup> Davison, "Your Word is a Lamp," 69, n. 108.

acrostics in the Psalter. In this respect, this study is similar to the work begun by Hanson and carried on by Soll.

Of course, before the hegemony of form criticism, with its emphasis on setting, dating and formulae, the poetics of the psalms were duly noted throughout the history of research. The survey of the research into the poetry of the Psalms presented above demonstrates this fact. For example, Philo of Alexandria and Josephus notice and comment upon the poetic qualities of biblical psalms. Also, an appreciation of poetics is evidenced in the writings of Origen and Jerome. The actual identification of poetic tropes is found in the writings of Cassiodorus. This emphasis continued in the works of De' Rossi, Calvin, and Lowth—quite an impressive list of biblical scholars.

Two basic approaches characterize this past research. These two approaches, which have profound methodological implications, are aptly described by Luis Schökel:

When Julian forbade the Christians from teaching the Greek and Latin “classics” in the year 362, some Christian authors began to compose “Christian classics” by imitation. They took themes and motifs from the Bible and created new literary texts. This was an implicit admission that the Bible was not literature . . . the accusation of “rusticity” [re: biblical writings] was accepted and met apologetically with Paul’s argument [I Cor 2:4-5]. This line was taken by Origen, Chrysostom, etc. On the other hand, the accusation was denied and it was affirmed that the Bible was literature. This was demonstrated by compiling lists of tropes and figures taken from the Bible. This was the approach taken by Augustine, among others. . . These two approaches dominated the Middle Ages. . . The rhetorical approach was passed on by Cassiodorus, Isidore, Bede, etc., while Prudentius, Sedulius and Juvencius developed epic and lyric imitation.<sup>114</sup>

Schökel is similarly interested in highlighting the stylistic and poetic intricacies of Hebrew poetry. In contrast to someone like Cassiodorus, for example, or perhaps even

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<sup>114</sup> Luis Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics* (*StudBib* 11; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1988), 1-2.

W. G. E. Watson,<sup>115</sup> Schökel is not interested in producing long lists of tropes. Instead, his interest is “above all stylistic,” examining various techniques of style and then asking the question: “what is its function generally and in the specific poem” under consideration.<sup>116</sup>

This emphasis upon *function* is the aim of the present study of these four alphabetic acrostic psalms. It is expected that a close reading of these four acrostics will also provide insight into interpretation of the overall message—the message the final editor is trying to communicate with the acrostic form. Also, this close reading should provide insight into what the psalmist is trying to communicate about the life of faith with Yahweh through the use of certain poetic devices such as: irony, satire, hyperbole, intensification, wordplay,<sup>117</sup> ambiguity, hyperbation, and assonance.<sup>118</sup> On the question of

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<sup>115</sup> Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (JSOTSup 26; Sheffield, England: JSOT, 1984).

<sup>116</sup> Schökel, *Manual*, 4. See also the discussion by G. A. Kennedy in his *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (rev. and enl. ed.; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 137-43. For the purposes of this study, I accept Kennedy’s assertion that, “Overall, poetics can be regarded as parallel to and overlapping with rhetoric” (136). Cf. P. Mosca who emphasizes the importance of stylistics while at the same time not eschewing form criticism. Despite his intention to give equal weight to form criticism and to rhetorical criticism, in the final analysis he seems to use rhetorical criticism not to emphasize the aesthetics/poetics of Ps 26 but rather to get behind the extant text to the historical/cultic setting. See Paul G. Mosca, “Psalm 26: Poetic Structure and the Form-Critical Task,” *CBQ* 47 (1985): 212-37 (see esp. 230-36).

<sup>117</sup> On the subject of word play or puns, see the recent (and intriguing) Scott Noegel, ed., *Puns and Pundits: Word Play [sic] in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature* (Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 2000). This work contains six chapters that focus on wordplay in various Hebrew Bible texts. Interestingly, none of the acrostic psalms are among the biblical texts discussed.

<sup>118</sup> This list is not meant to be exhaustive, but merely illustrative. As the particular psalms in question are read and analyzed in successive chapters, additional poetic devices

the legitimacy of applying “modern” literary terms or categories to ancient literature, the comments by Weisman are apropos:

The use of later and even modern terms for the study of ancient literature, and of the Hebrew Bible in particular, is permissible as long as the scholar is aware of the risk involved . . .” It seems to me that whatever risks are involved in the use of such terms can be mitigated by remembering that said terms are descriptive and not prescriptive. That is, even though *satire*, for example, is a Latin term we can use it heuristically to describe biblical poetics that function in ways similar to what we mean by the term “satire.”<sup>119</sup>

Unfortunately, as R. Alter points out, the genres of the individual psalms often are assumed to be a “fixed entity.”<sup>120</sup> This oversimplified classification of individual psalms into concretized forms tends to neglect the “poetic richness” of particular psalms. The focus of this study, therefore, is the *poetics* of the four acrostic psalms in Book I of the Psalter. I respect the decades of work done in the form-critical classification of the individual psalms. This research will be recognized and built upon throughout this study, for such form-critical work is foundational. The focus of this study, however, lies along a different path. The present study does not wish to determine whether or not Ps 9/10 is a Thanksgiving Psalm or a Lament. This study wishes rather to understand the rhetorical and poetic power and function of certain poetic devices used within these acrostic poems.

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are likely to be encountered. A basic definition of the specific poetic devices found in the acrostics will be provided within the comments on the particular psalm.

<sup>119</sup> Weisman, *Political Satire*, 1. This position is, of course, in stark contrast to the position of Lowth as noted above on p. 17. See Lowth, *Lectures*, 1:105-106.

<sup>120</sup> Robert Alter, “Psalms,” in *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 247. Cf. Schökel, *Manual*, 10-11, 57, 92-3, 120-21, 193 and Levine, *Sing Unto God*, 15-17. Interestingly, in Schaefer’s recent commentary on the Psalter, he refuses to catalogue the individual psalms by type. He chooses instead to “present a mental snapshot of the psalm and highlight some of the contours of the poetry, the phrases and images.” His goal is to “enhance the reader’s appreciation of the rhetoric and imagery, which are major keys to the meaning of the psalms” (Schaefer, *Psalms*, viii).

As K. Seybold observes, at least some of the psalms were “composed as a work of art and it is as a work of art that [the Psalter] is to be read and heard.”<sup>121</sup> Thus this study, methodologically, is in the tradition of poetic studies of the psalms—studies that give attention to the literary qualities of the individual poems.<sup>122</sup>

Other questions also arise. First, Freedman has demonstrated metrical connections between these first four alphabetic acrostic psalms.<sup>123</sup> Are there additionally any poetical

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<sup>121</sup> Klaus Seybold, *Introducing the Psalms* (trans. R. G. Dunphy; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 46. On the importance of focusing on the “oral/aural quality” of all biblical poetry, see Levine, *Sing Unto God*, 85-87.

<sup>122</sup> James Muilenburg, “Form Criticism and Beyond” *JBL* 88 (1969): 7-8, 10-11, 16-18; Schökel and Kessler, “Poetic Structure,” 4-15; In an important article, also from 1976, Brevard Childs spoke frankly of the “diminishing returns” offered by form criticism in his “Reflections on the Modern Study of the Psalms,” in *Magnalia Dei, The Mighty Acts of God: Essays in Memory of G. Ernest Wright* (ed. F. M. Cross, W. E. Lemke and P. D. Miller, Jr.; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976), 378. Brueggemann, *Psalms and Life*, 237-43 and Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg, 1984); Marc Girard, *Les Psaumes: Analyse Structurelle et Interpretation: 1-50* (RNS 2; Montreal: Bellarmin, 1984), 16-43; Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1985); Patrick D. Miller, Jr., *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia, Penn.: Fortress, 1986), 16-17, 29-30, 33-34, 40-47; Alex Preminger and Edward L. Greenstein, *The Hebrew Bible in Literary Criticism* (New York: Ungar, 1986), 45-256; Donald K. Berry, *The Psalms and Their Readers: Interpretive Strategies for Psalm 18* (JSOTSup 153; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 15-17, 81-103; S. E. Gillingham, *The Poems and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 24-28, 190-205; W. H. Bellinger, Jr., *A Hermeneutic of Curiosity and Readings of Psalm 61* (SOTI 1; Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1995), 13-16, 71-103; J. Clinton McCann, “Psalms,” Pages 639-1280 in *The New Interpreters’ Bible*, Vol. IV (ed. Leander E. Keck; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996); David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Poetical Books* (TBS 41; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 16-152; James L. Crenshaw, *The Psalms: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids.: Eerdmans, 2001), 96-97, 115-17, 136-41 and Schaefer, *Psalms*. In contrast to several recent works, which emphasize the poetical/rhetorical features of the psalms, Mays opts not to give detailed attention to these features in James L. Mays, *Psalms* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox, 1994), 6.

<sup>123</sup> Freedman, *Psalms 119*, 3-4.

connections—semantic or grammatical—between these psalms? Second, is there any significance to the number of acrostic poems in Book I (four) or in the Psalter (eight)? Is there any theological significance to the number four? Freedman touches on this question, but there is more to be said.<sup>124</sup> Third, is there any significance to the fact that there are four acrostics in Book I and four in Book V? Again, Freedman has touched upon this question but more can be said about the implications of this phenomenon for the theological unity of the Psalter.

Chapters two through five of this study will systematically look at each of the four acrostic psalms individually. Each psalm will be worked through, highlighting the specific poetic devices found therein. Then suggestions will be offered as to the functions of those poetic devices in contributing to the structure, the message, and the rhetorical power of each individual acrostic poem. In other words, the question of the possible effect of the poetic devices on the reader or auditor will be raised.

The final chapter will consist of summary and conclusions. This chapter is the place where my study will further explore possible poetic and rhetorical links between the pairs delineated by Freedman. This final chapter will also offer suggestions of linguistic links between the pairs of acrostics that are not structurally parallel according to Freedman's schema. Finally, additional areas for further study in connection with the Book I and Book V alphabetic acrostics will be suggested.

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 3-4; Marvin H. Pope, "Number, Numbering, Numbers," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (ed. G. A. Buttrick; 4 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 3:565-66. See also Georges Ifrah, *From One to Zero: A Universal History of Numbers* (trans. Lowell Bair; New York: Viking, 1985).

## CHAPTER TWO

### Psalm 9/10

#### *Introduction*

The focus of this chapter is specifically on the first acrostic psalm in the Psalter's Book I—Ps 9/10. Since this is the first chapter of this study to focus on the text itself, this chapter will be paradigmatic and so a few preliminary comments on format are in order. I will work through Ps 9/10 with a working translation in mind, looking for certain poetic devices and commenting on these when found. I recognize the subjectivity involved in this task. As Roman Jakobson points out in his essay “What is Poetry?” even determining the definition of poetry is not a simple task: “To define the term, we shall have to juxtapose what poetry is to what it is not. But to determine even what poetry is not is no longer simple.”<sup>1</sup> As Jakobson observes, and as will be highlighted in this chapter, the concept of “poetic devices” cannot be limited to encyclopedia-type, immutable, objective figures of speech that are considered exclusively poetic.<sup>2</sup> There

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<sup>1</sup> R. Jakobson, “What is Poetry?,” in *Selected Writings* (ed. Stephen Rudy; 8 vols.; The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton, 1981), 3:740.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 742. Jakobson also says: “. . . even if we succeed in isolating those devices that typify the poets of a given period, we have still to establish the line of demarcation between poetry and non-poetry. The same alliterations and other types of euphonic devices are used by the rhetoric of the period . . .” (741). Jakobson does, however, distinguish between poetry (verse) and prose in Roman Jakobson and Linda R. Waugh, assisted by Martha Taylor, *The Sound Shape of Language* (3d ed.; Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2002), 218-19, cf. 234, 238.

also exists a “poetry of grammar”<sup>3</sup> and this aspect of poetic artistry is evidenced in the acrostic Ps 9/10 and must be considered. In fact, this poetry of grammar produces in Ps 9/10 *grammatical* poetic devices that are just as significant as semantic *poetic devices* or *artistic components*.<sup>4</sup>

I will wait until the end of this chapter to actually produce a translation of Psalm 9/10—one that will reflect the insights gained by noting the *functions* of the various *artistic components* used by the poet. The first task at hand, however, is to focus on the use of poetic devices, semantic and grammatical, making observations on how they function within the unified poem which is Ps 9/10. These observations about function are valid regardless of whether or not the poet “intended” such literary effects.<sup>5</sup> On the whole question of intentionality, Jakobson introduces what seems to me to be a more helpful concept—the concept of *intuition*:

Any significant poetic composition, whether it is an improvement or the fruit of long and painstaking labor, implies a goal-oriented choice of verbal material . . .

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<sup>3</sup> See R. Jakobson, “Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry”, in *Language in Literature* (ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy; Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap/Harvard, 1987), 121-22, 129-31.

<sup>4</sup> Following Jakobson, these terms will be used interchangeably throughout this chapter. See his “What is Poetry?” (369) and “Subliminal Verbal Patterning in Poetry” (251), both in *Language in Literature* (ed. K. Pomorska and S. Rudy). Jakobson also uses the term “artistic devices” in “The Dominant,” *Selected Writings*, 3:754. Artistic devices or components will, of course, include repetitive patterns of phonemes and of sounds—both significant components of meaning in Jakobson’s approach. He does not ignore form but rather “foregrounds” it and explores its contribution to meaning or content. This exploration extends down to the level of individual phonemes.

<sup>5</sup> R. Jakobson, “Subliminal Verbal Patterning in Poetry” in *Language and Literature* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap/Harvard, 1987), 250. Compare John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (rev. and enl. ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 147-51 and Robert Alter *The World of Biblical Literature* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 2-3.

What the pivots of this network [framework] are may and quite frequently does remain outside of his (author's) awareness, but even without being able to single out the pertinent expedients, the poet and his receptive reader nevertheless spontaneously apprehend the artistic advantage of a context endowed with those components over a similar one devoid of them. . . . There remains . . . an open question: whether in certain cases *intuitive* verbal latency does not precede and underlie even such a conscious consideration.<sup>6</sup>

Jakobson continues to discuss the issue of intuition:

Phonology and grammar of oral poetry offer a system of complex and elaborate correspondences which come into being, take effect, and are handed down through generations without anyone's cognizance of the rules governing this intricate network. The immediate and spontaneous grasp of effects without rational elicitation of the processes by which they are produced is not confined to the oral tradition and its transmitters. Intuition may act as the main or, not seldom, even sole designer of the complicated phonological and grammatical structures in the writings of individual poets. Such structures, particularly powerful on the subliminal level, can function without any assistance of logical judgment and patent knowledge both in the poet's creative work and in its perception by the sensitive reader . . .<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> R. Jakobson, "Subliminal Verbal Patterning in Poetry" in *Language in Literature*, 250-51.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 261. Cf. Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," *Selected Writings*, 3:22: "If we analyze language from the standpoint of the information it carries, we cannot restrict the notion of information to the cognitive aspect of language." The issue of subliminal or even biological predisposition towards order, patterning, aesthetics and design is discussed in Donald A. Norman, *Emotional Design: Why We Love (Or Hate) Everyday Things* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 6-8, 19, 25, 29, 31-32. For Norman it is impossible to separate or dichotomize emotion and cognition. He says: "All that we do and think is tinged with emotion [the realm of aesthetics], much of it subconscious" (7). This thesis is related to Jakobson's thesis that it is impossible to separate "form" [structure, pattern—often subconscious] from "content" [meaning or, if you please, cognition]. Form and content are inter-related, interwoven—as are emotion/aesthetics/patterning *and* cognition / "rational" thought. In an earlier book, Norman attributes the power of stories to the "encapsulation" of "information, knowledge, context and emotion" in his *Things That Make Us Smart: Defending Human Attributes in the Age of the Machine* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1993), 129. Cf. Virginia Postrel, *The Substance of Style: How the Rise of Aesthetic Value is Remaking Commerce, Culture, & Consciousness* (New York, N.Y.: HarperCollins, 2003), xiv-xv, 9, 10, 32.

Jakobson's approach, specifically its application to biblical poetry, has been challenged and criticized by Ziony Zevit. He focuses upon Jakobson's poetic analysis of the grammatical patterning and parallelism found in Song of Songs 4:8.<sup>8</sup> Zevit says he does not question the existence of the pattern that Jakobson discovers, but he does question whether subconscious patterning is relevant. He says, "Without denying the reality of the pattern that Jakobson perceived, I would say that it is more real than apparent, and in poetry it is apparency, awareness on the conscious level, that counts."<sup>9</sup> Zevit does not marshal evidence to prove the last part of this statement—a statement that serves as one of his main presuppositions in reading biblical poetry. His position and criticism of Jakobson on this point is ably challenged by Francis Landy who shows that none of Zevit's arguments support the claim that awareness at the conscious level is all that is important in poetry.<sup>10</sup>

Jakobson's insights, therefore, provide a powerful refinement and focus to generalized statements about biblical poetry made by biblical scholars. Seybold is one of many biblical commentators who remind us that the Psalter contains "works of poetic art,

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<sup>8</sup> Jakobson, "Grammatical Parallelism and Its Russian Facet," in *Language in Literature*, 174-6.

<sup>9</sup> Z. Zevit, "Roman Jakobson, Psycholinguistics, and Biblical Poetry," *JBL* (1990): 390.

<sup>10</sup> F. Landy, "In Defense of Jakobson," *JBL* (1992): 109-11. He says: "If all that counted were conscious awareness, criticism would be otiose. The function of criticism is to explicate an awareness of beauty that we apprehend and a meaning that we cannot as yet understand . . . A poem needs to be read many times and still remains unfathomable; the aesthetic impact, however, is immediate . . . An audience, ancient or modern, might easily appreciate the musicality of the Song of Songs, without being able consciously to analyze it . . . (111).

composed by writers and singers who wished to be regarded and understood as artists.”<sup>11</sup>

A similar point is made by C. S. Lewis in his comments on the Psalter:

What must be said . . . is that the Psalms are poems, and poems intended to be sung: not doctrinal treatises, nor even sermons. . . The Psalms must be read as poems; as lyrics, with all the licenses and all the formalities, the hyperboles, the emotional rather than logical connections, which are proper to lyric poetry. They must be read as poems . . . no less than French must be read as French or English as English.<sup>12</sup>

These observations, while helpful, must be fine tuned by Jakobson’s insights on the nature of language itself—in particular, the language of verse. The verse *form* of poetry is not merely ornamental and thereby extraneous to meaning. Rather, the form or structure of verse is constitutive to meaning! These principles will be borne in mind while reading through the poetic language of Ps 9/10.

The acrostic pattern in Pss 9 and 10, although incomplete, suggests these two poems are a single unit in their final, canonical form.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, this study will search for poetic devices and repetitive patterns and sounds not only in each of these individual

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<sup>11</sup> Klaus Seybold in *Introducing the Psalms* (trans. R. Graeme Dunphy; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 47-8.

<sup>12</sup> Lewis in his 1955 "Reflections on the Psalms," in *The Inspirational Writings of C. S. Lewis* (repr., New York: Inspirational Press, 1987), 134.

<sup>13</sup> See also Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59* (trans. Hilton C. Oswald; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1988), 191. Cf. Hermann Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926), 32 and Robert Gordis, "Psalm 9-10 – A Textual and Exegetical Study," *JQR* 48 (1957): 104; Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50* (WBC 19; Waco: Word, 1983), 116 lists other linguistic connections between Pss 9 and 10 in addition to the one cited by Gunkel and Kraus. Cf. Rudolf Kittel, *Die Psalmen, übersetzt und erklärt* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.; Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1929), 32-34. In contrast, Robert C. Culley, *Oral Formulaic Language in the Biblical Psalms* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1967) maintains that Pss 9 and 10 were not a unified composition (107). Culley’s claim is a minority position.

psalms as they stand in the Masoretic text but will also extend the search across the division between Ps 9 and Ps 10. Hanson affirmed the unity of these psalms by listing keywords that occur not just in one but in both of these psalms.<sup>14</sup> In what follows, I will highlight certain poetic components and will comment on their function in these individual psalms noting any devices that extend from Ps 9 into the language of Ps 10.

### *Psalm 9*

The first poetic device in Ps 9 occurs in vv. 2-3.<sup>15</sup> Here we find perhaps a precursor of the detailed acrostic in Ps 119 where each of the eight cola sections begins with a successive consonant of the Hebrew alphabet. Each of the four bi-cola in 9:2-3 begins with א. Franz Delitzsch points out that “in this first strophe of the Psalm . . . the alphabetical form is carried out in the fullest possible way.”<sup>16</sup> The four verbs are אודת; אספרה; אשמחה and אומר. This acrostic pattern is not, however, the complete story for there is a fifth verb in v. 3 that begins with א (אעלצה) and all five of these verbs are cohortatives that end with a paragogic ה. Kraus says these five verbs are “characteristic” (of the individual thanksgiving song) but he does not note the expanded acrostic pattern

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<sup>14</sup> K. C. Hanson, “Alphabetic Acrostics: A Form Critical Study” (Ph.D. diss., The Claremont Graduate School, 1984), 28-29. This effort follows earlier (if not as extensive) work, such as that of J. Leveen, “Psalm X: A Reconstruction,” *JTS* 45 (1944): 16-17 and Gordis, “Psalm 9-10,” 108-9 among others.

<sup>15</sup> Following the Hebrew Bible versification and so throughout this study.

<sup>16</sup> See F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms* (2d ed. rev.; trans. Francis Bolton; 3 vols.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1871), 1:162. Cf. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 32.

involved here.<sup>17</sup> The impact of this concatenation of **א**'s is striking both aurally and visually—the beginning of this poem is underscored by means of consonance, with the five successive *alephs* providing a pattern or shape to the opening lines of the poem. Watson lists several functions of the poetic device alliteration. These are also functions of consonance (which is a type of alliteration): (1) cohesion—binding together a line, strophe, stanza, etc (2) mnemonic (3) enargaic (i.e., functioning to focus the attention of the reader upon an object, person or event), (4) the vocative function in which the alliteration emphasizes imperative forms (as in Joel 2:15-16) and (5) the “endstop” function that emphasizes the close of a poetic segment.<sup>18</sup> Here in the opening verses of Ps 9/10, the successive *alephs* seem to focus attention on the psalmist's heart-felt, exuberant praise for Yahweh. The following table visually displays the impact of such a pattern.

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<sup>17</sup> Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 194. Similarly, Walter Brueggemann, “Psalms 9-10: A Counter to Conventional Social Reality,” in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (ed. Patrick D. Miller; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 218, n 6.

<sup>18</sup> Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (JSOT Sup 26; Sheffield: JSOT, 1984), 227-8. On alliteration and structure, see R. Jakobson, “The Spell of Speech Sounds,” *Selected Writings* (ed. Stephen Rudy; Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1988), 8:229-32. On the potential value of noting alliteration patterns in possibly determining the provenance of a particular psalm, see William L. Holladay, *The Psalms Through Three Thousand Years: Prayerbook of a Cloud of Witnesses* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1993) and his comments on the Canaanite roots of Ps 29 (21-22, and the bibliography he cites). Cf. Patrick D. Miller, Jr., *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1986), on the occurrence of *alliteration* and *assonance* in Ps 18:28 (39).

TABLE 1  
FIVE SUCCESSIVE INITIAL *ALEPHS*

Phrase	Verse
1. אֹדָה	v. 2a
2. אִסְפָּרָה	v. 2b
3. אֲשַׁמְחָה	v. 3a
4. אֲעֲלֶצָה(1)	v. 3a
5. אֲזַמְרָה	v. 3b

Not only does each of the five words begin with א, but each word also ends with the letter ה. This phenomenon is an example of symmetry—an aspect of the “poetry of grammar.”<sup>19</sup> This grammatically-balanced beginning is an elegant opening for this poem and serves to emphasize the psalmist’s thanksgiving for Yahweh’s help.

An additional incidence of the “poetry of grammar” should be examined. Jakobson argues that morphologically similar words, distinct in their semantic value, may be placed together within the internal “world” of the poem in a way that suggests identity of

<sup>19</sup> See Jakobson, “Poetry of Grammar,” 127, 132-33. In another essay, Jakobson discusses “the propensity to frequent quintuple sound repetitions in poetry” in “Subliminal Verbal Patterning in Poetry,” 254. One of the effects of symmetry is that it adds a “particular potency and eloquence” to the poem (Jakobson, “Yeats’ ‘Sorrow of Love’ Through the Years,” in *Language in Literature*, 221). See also See Paul Joüon, S.J., *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (trans. and rev. T. Muraoka; 2 vols.; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1996), 1:25 (5h,j) on א and ה which he classifies as “laryngal voiceless gutturals.” Thus, the symmetry in vv. 2-3 extends to the very classification of the two guttural consonants (phonemes) involved. On translating the cohortative, see Joüon, *Grammar*, 2:374 (114b).

meaning.<sup>20</sup> For example, in this poem the terms **אודה** and **אספרה** in v. 2 have distinct semantic meanings, “to praise” and “to recount” respectively. In this verse, however, these two terms are morphologically similar, due to their inflectional forms, and are placed together with the effect that they become synonymous in the internal world of the poem. Thus, to “praise Yahweh with all of my heart” is equivalent to “recounting all [his] wonderful deeds.” Similarly in v. 3, the statement: “I will rejoice (**אשמחה**) in you” is functionally equivalent to the statement: “I will sing (**אזמרה**) to your name.”

The functions just listed have to do with emphasis in one fashion or another. These verbs of rejoicing and praise of Yahweh’s wondrous works are further emphasized by means of the **ן** ending of all five verbs and the **ןַ** ending of four of the five verbs, another example of consonance.<sup>21</sup> In Ps 9:2-3 this double poetic device appears to emphasize not only the beginning of the poem but also to emphasize the heart-felt praise for Yahweh’s glory.

The second and third poetic devices to be noted in Ps 9 are to be found in vv. 4-7, 18-19 and involve the artistic component of repetition. According to N. H. Ridderbos, repetition is the most important rhetorical device in the Psalter.<sup>22</sup> There also appears to be chiasmic-type paralleling involved in the repetition of key terms in the verses following v. 4 and also v.18. This balance or symmetry can be seen in the following table. The

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<sup>20</sup> Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics,” *Selected Writings*, 3:27, 40, 43.

<sup>21</sup> See Jakobson, “Spell of Speech Sounds,” 8:229-30. Jakobson comments on the extensive use of this poetic device in a select E. E. Cummings poem, saying the repeated consonants contribute to the “structuration of the poem” (229)

<sup>22</sup> Ridderbos, “The Psalms: Style-Figures and Structure” *OtSt* 13 (1963): 44.

comparison in this table is not between the two columns but the verses/repeated terms listed in each column. Nevertheless, it is also instructive to compare the two columns and to see that this chiasmic paralleling occurs twice in Ps 9, once in the early section and once in the latter section of the poem.

TABLE 2  
CHIASMIC PARALLELING IN PS 9

Early Section	Latter Section
“when my enemies. . . were destroyed,” v. 4	“the nations who forget God,” v. 18
“you destroyed the wicked,” v. 6a	“will not be forgotten forever,” v. 19a
“the enemy comes to complete... desolation,” v. 7a	“let the nations be judged,” v. 20b

One more observation with respect to the grammar of the poetry in vv. 4-5 is warranted. Jakobson has shown that “an alternation of grammatical categories of person” can function as a “means of intense dramatization.”<sup>23</sup> In vv. 4-5, such a dramatization occurs in the contrast between the third person plural in describing the activities of the wicked enemies (יִכְשְׁלוּ וַיִּאֲבֹדוּ, “they stagger and they perish”) and the second person

<sup>23</sup> Jakobson, “Poetry of Grammar,” in *Language in Literature*, 122. Earlier in this essay, Jakobson notes that: “the guiding significance of the morphological and syntactic fabric is [sometimes] interwoven with and rivals the artistic role of verbal tropes” (121).

in describing the activities of Yahweh (כִּי־עָשִׂיתָ . . . יָשַׁבְתָּ, “for you upheld . . . you sat”).

In vv. 4 and 18, one also finds one of many repeated words in this acrostic poem, the word שׁוֹב.<sup>24</sup> In the first occurrence of this term (v. 4), the psalmist names a specific wondrous work for which he sings praise to the name of Yahweh: “when my enemies turn back, they stumble and perish before you.” The description of Yahweh’s destruction of the enemies continues in vv. 5-6 with the repetition of enemy (אֹיִב) in v. 7 forming a nice inclusio structure. Within this inclusio the “enemies” are also identified as “the nations” (גּוֹיִם) and “the wicked” (רָשָׁע). Back to the term שׁוֹב, two observations are in order. First, the repetition of this term is an example of a type of intensification.<sup>25</sup> That is, in v. 4 the reader has to wait until vv. 6-7 to discover the full extent of the destruction of the wicked enemies (the nations). In v. 18, however, there is additional information, a

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<sup>24</sup> The repeated words in Ps 9/10 include the following: אֲבָד (9:4, 6, 7, 19; 10:16); אָנוּשׁ (9:20, 21; 10:18); גּוֹיִם (9:6, 16, 18, 20, 21; 10:16); דָּךְ (9:10; 10:18); דָּרַשׁ (9:11, 13, 10:4, 13, 15); עָנִי/עָנוּ (9:13, 14, 19; 10:2, 9, 12, 17; compare: 25:9, 16, 18; 34:3, 7; 37:11, 14; 119:50, 92, 153); עֹזֵב (9:11; 10:14; compare: 37:25, 28, 33); שָׁפַט (9:5, 8, 9, 17, 20; 10:5, 18; compare: 37:33); רָשָׁע (9:6, 17, 18; 10:2, 3, 4, 13, 15; cf. 37:10, 12, 14, 16, 17, 20, 21, 28, 32, 33, 34, 35, 38, 40; 119:53, 61, 95, 110, 119, 155); רָשָׁתָּ (9:16; 10:9; cf. 25:15); and שׁוֹב (9:4, 18). Specifically on the root שׁוֹב, see the classic work by William L. Holladay, *The Root Subh in the Old Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958), 64, 74.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Alter speaks of intensification in a narrower sense, that is, intensification in connection with the parallelism of lines in Hebrew poetry, in his *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 10-11, 19, 29, 61-84. Cf. R. Alter, “Ancient Hebrew Poetry,” in *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 615-16.

“heightening,”<sup>26</sup> if you will, in connection with the “turning” of the psalmist’s adversaries. Verse 18 says: “the wicked ones will turn back to Sheol, all the nations who forget God.” The reader does not have to wait further or to guess regarding the extent of their destruction. And for all of the terms used in vv. 6-7 to emphasize the destruction of the enemies of the psalmist, none of that is as final as the statement in v. 18—they turn/return to Sheol.

The second observation about the repetition of **וָשׁוּב** involves the rhetorical device known as political satire. The definition of satire for the purposes of this study is the definition offered by Ze’ev Weisman who notes the difference between satire and irony. Wit is, of course, a tool in both irony and in satire but “in satire [wit] evokes disdain and contempt . . . Joy at the sudden destruction of the adversary is the tiny distinction between satire and irony.”<sup>27</sup> The psalmist’s enemies (the wicked, the nations) will turn/return to Sheol. The disdain and contempt for the wicked enemies can be sensed as

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<sup>26</sup> Alter, “Ancient Hebrew Poetry,” 615. Alter uses this term interchangeably with the term “intensification.”

<sup>27</sup> See Ze’ev Weisman, *Political Satire in the Bible* (SBLSem 32; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1998), 3, 8. See also: Athalya Brenner, “On the Semantic Field of Humour, Laughter and the Comic in the Old Testament,” in *On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup 23; ed. Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990), 41-2, 51, 57 and Thomas Jemielity, *Satire and the Hebrew Prophets* (LCBI; Louisville, Kent.: Westminster/John Knox, 1992): “Hebrew prophecy displays a full range of satiric technique, theme, and victim. Hebrew prophecy, however unwittingly and unconsciously [cf. 24-26], provides abundant evidence of the satiric, or at least the proto-satiric, long before the usually cited and familiar appearance of this evidence among the classical Greeks and Romans” (23). Apparently, this artistic component or technique of satirical speech is used not only in Hebrew prophecy but also in Hebrew psalmody. Cf. Miller, *Interpreting*, 42-3, on the “ironic” repetition of **וָשׁוּב** in Ps 90:3[2].

the psalmist rejoices at their ultimate demise. There is a spirit of joy or delight in the destruction of the enemy.

This use of satire to evoke contempt for the adversaries, however, is not the only rhetorical use of language involved in these verses. E. Bloom notes that many ancient cultures believed that imprecations and invectives were imbued with power to, at least in part, effect what had been articulated.<sup>28</sup>

In contrast, to older “magical” views of this phenomenon, speech-act theorists deny that there is an inherent power residing in the spoken word. They prefer to speak in terms of “performative speech.” Examples of such performative speech include: vows, blessings, curses, verdicts and warnings. These forms of speech are not imbued with inherent magical power, but instead produce effects when they are spoken in a particular situation by the appropriate person.<sup>29</sup>

In the case of vv. 4 and 18, magical or non-magical, the point remains the same. There is expressed joy at the ultimate demise of those who forget God. There is also a cultural expectation that the words of the worshipper, as a righteous person who serves Yahweh, will set in motion the deserved destruction.

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<sup>28</sup> Edward A. Bloom, “Satire,” in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (ed. Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan; Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 1114. Bloom also mentions the close connection in ancient cultures between satirical language and imprecations or invectives. Compare Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (trans. D. M. G. Stalker; 2 vols.; New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 2:81.

<sup>29</sup> The philosopher of language behind this insight was John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (2d ed.; ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975). Austin’s insights related to literary criticism and, more specifically, to biblical literary criticism are summarized and expanded in Hugh C. White, ed. *Speech Act Theory and Biblical Criticism* (SBLSem 41; Decatur, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1988).

Another question arises as to the effect of political satire upon the hearers and fellow singers of the psalm. I cannot say whether or not the poet intended such an effect, but the effect is the same regardless of intention. The issue of intention is, in fact, actually moot in light of Jakobson's concept of intuition.<sup>30</sup> The effect or function of the satire in vv. 4 and 18 is what is important for this study. The satire here in these verses functions to diminish the power and threat of the enemy in the minds of those who hear this song sung in the "gates of the daughter of Zion" (v. 15).

To put this poem in the larger context of the Hebrew Psalter, this lament is one of the many psalms of "disorientation" in which the psalmists cry out with rage during times of suffering.<sup>31</sup> This psalm reflects times of disorientation in the thought of the poet and in the thoughts of those countless worshippers who may have sung or heard sung its words in various settings of suffering. During such times one needs reassurance of faith in the old securities that are apparently no longer able to provide personal or communal security (see especially 10:1). The psalm makes use of satire to provide that reassurance and to give hope to the singer in the midst of his/her suffering. While the song describes resentment and suffering at the hand of the evil enemy, the song also points to better times ahead.

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<sup>30</sup> R. Jakobson, "Subliminal Verbal Patterning in Poetry" in *Language in Literature*, 261.

<sup>31</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (AOTS; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 19. See also: Sigmund Freud, "Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious," 97, 100, 101, 105 in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (trans. James Strachey; London: Hogarth, 1960). Freud makes the following observation about hostile jokes, one form of tendentious joke that includes satire: "The joke then represents a rebellion against . . . authority, a liberation from its pressure" (105). In the case of Ps 9's satire, the authority or power being rebelled against is the power of the psalmist's wicked enemies.

Thus satire becomes a rhetorical tool of persuasion, used within the psalmist's song of lament—used to persuade the hearers of this song that there is light (“hope”, v. 19) at the end of the dark tunnel of despair. Brueggemann makes a couple of interesting observations about the rhetoric of the complaint section of the psalm of disorientation (the lament psalm):

Whether this speech articulates, illuminates, or evokes experience, it does move the awareness and imagination of the speaker [and hearer!] away from life well-ordered into an arena of terror, raggedness, and hurt. . . . It does not surprise us that these psalms tend to hyperbole, vivid imagery, and statements that offend “proper” and civil religious sensitivities . . . . Though this speech is liberated and expansive, it tends to come to expression in rather consistent and rigorous forms. That is not because the speakers are dull and unimaginative and cannot think of a fresh way to speak; it is rather that the speech itself imposes a kind of recurring order in the disorientation so that it has an orderliness of its own that is known and recognized in the community.<sup>32</sup>

One may question Brueggemann's use of the word “hyperbole” to describe the language of lament and suffering in these psalms of disorientation. He does, however, make the point that the lament psalmists' language is full of vivid and expansive imagery. As a psalm of disorientation, the lament language of Psalm 9 does make use of this type of imagery and language.

One last observation about the use of satire in Ps 9 is in order. In the lament psalms, the complaint section of the psalm includes: an address to God, the verbalization of the complaint, a petition for God to act and motivations for God to act, and a concluding

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<sup>32</sup> Brueggemann, *Message*, 53-54. On Brueggemann's comments on the community recognizing the recurring order/orderliness, see Jakobson, “Subliminal Verbal Patterning in Poetry,” in *Selected Writings*: “Phonology and grammar of oral poetry offer a system of complex and elaborate correspondences which come into being, take effect, and are handed down through generations without anyone's cognizance of the rules governing this intricate network” (3:147).

section of imprecation.<sup>33</sup> The motivations give God reason to act decisively. But on the other side of the relationship, the satirical, disdainful<sup>34</sup> rhetoric of the psalmist on the joyful occasion of the destruction of the enemy gives the auditors reason to do something—to hope (v. 19)—just as the motivations give God reason to do something. But why is it necessary, in the internal world of the psalm, to diminish the power of the wicked enemy who has been destroyed (vv. 4, 6-7)? Because when Ps 9/10 is read as a unit, the wicked return in 10:2-4.<sup>35</sup> That is, the wicked enemy who was putatively destroyed once and for all is back. This surprising development is actually hinted at in 9:19, in the midst of the wordplays that are emphasizing the demise of the wicked (vv. 16-19).

There is also a sarcastic wordplay in Ps 9 between שחת in v. 16 and שאל in v. 18. The former term, while usually referring to a pit in which an animal can be trapped, can also be used as a synonym for death or שאל (see Pss 16:10; 30:10; 49:10; 55:24 and 103:4).<sup>36</sup> This wordplay is sarcastic because the “pit” made by the wicked nations for

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<sup>33</sup> See Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 33, 64.

<sup>34</sup> Weisman, *Political Satire*, 3, 8.

<sup>35</sup> Brueggemann, “Psalms 9-10,” 222-23.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, eds. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford, England: Clarendon, 1907), 1001. Most of the wordplays identified in this study involve semantics or phonetics. On the “third dimension” of wordplay in ancient Egyptian literature—the dimension of writing or signs—see A. Loprieno, “Puns and Word Play in Ancient Egyptian,” in Scott Noegel, ed., *Puns and Pundits: Word Play in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature* (Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 2000), 4-5, 13, 19, 20. Later, Loprieno underscores the important connection between “oral performance and written text in the

others, into which they themselves fall, foreshadows the “pit” (Sheol) which they have not made but to which they will be turned. This play on words can also be viewed as yet another case of intensification. The “pit” in v. 16, the destination of the nations, could be a temporary fate; but in v. 18 we read of the ultimate “pit” from which there is no escape. There will be no “return” of the wicked enemy from this demise. In either case, the use of these two synonyms that are sometimes both used to refer to the pit of death (Sheol) creates the wordplay here in these verses.

In addition to the irony found in the wordplay between שחת in v. 16 and שאל in v. 18, there is in v. 16 another type of irony—a kind of dramatic irony.<sup>37</sup> The nations engineered their own demise through the digging of a pit (שחת) and the laying of a net (רשת) for the righteous psalmist. This line of the poem is another instance in which the morphological/inflected forms of the two words בשחת and ברשת, both beginning and ending the same phonemically, hint at equivalence of meaning in the internal world of this poem. This equivalence is present even though semantically these two terms are not synonymous.<sup>38</sup>

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development of Egyptian literature” and he also points out that the “first function of the literary pun [in Egyptian] is to produce entertainment” (15).

<sup>37</sup> Four different sub-types of dramatic irony are listed by William Van O’Connor and Ernst H. Behler, “Irony,” in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (ed. Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan; Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 633-35. The text here seems to fit the following category: “characters or situations are compared or contrasted for ironic effects . . .” (635). Contrast Watson, *Hebrew Poetry*, 311-12, whose definition of dramatic/situational irony seems too narrow.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics,” in *Selected Writings*, 3:27, 40, 43.

The wicked is thus caught “in the work of his own hands” (v. 17; cf. 5:11; 7:16-17; 10:2; 37:15 and Obad 15). This irony of the wicked falling into his own trap is enriched by the statement in v. 17a: “Yahweh has . . . executed judgment.” According to the poet, Yahweh has used the enemy’s own “club”, so to speak, in his own hand, to execute judgment.<sup>39</sup>

Before leaving 9:4, another poetic device should be noted. This device has to do with another key or repeated word, the word **אבד**. This term occurs five times in Ps 9/10 (9:4, 6, 7, 19 and 10:16) and means “to perish; to destroy; to annihilate.”<sup>40</sup> The first three of these occurrences constitute another case of the rhetorical device of intensification that was introduced earlier in connection with the repetition of the term **שׂוֹב** in vv. 4 and 18. The first occurrence of **אבד** in v. 4 describes the fate of the enemies—they perish or are destroyed before him. In v. 6, the repetition of the term serves to emphasize Yahweh’s punitive destruction and also helps to equate the psalmist’s “enemies” (v. 4) with “the nations” (**גוֹיִם**) and “the wicked” (**רָשָׁע**). Then in v. 7 comes the intensification. The poet returns to using the designation “enemy” (which closes the *inclusio* begun in v. 4 and which was discussed earlier), but this time the enemy/nations/wicked is not only

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<sup>39</sup> See comments on 7:13-16 (concept of “immanent nemesis”, G. von Rad’s term) in Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 174. Detailed discussion in G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:384-86. Neither of these scholars, however, comment on the ironic possibilities in the texts where this *Weltanschauung* is promulgated.

<sup>40</sup> Benedikt Otzen, “**אָבַד**,” *TDOT* 1:19-23 (esp. 21-22). William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), suggests that when used with **מִן** and **מִפְנֵי**, **אבד** should be translated: “to be carried off from” or “to be carried off before” (e.g., in Ps 9:4) respectively (1). The use of **אבד** in Ps 68:3, however, (with **מִפְנֵי**, as in 9:4) would seem to militate against such a translation. Note the parallelism in 68:3 with wax that melts before the fire.

“destroyed”—their very “memory” (זכר) is “destroyed.” This fate is especially dreaded in the culture of the psalmist.<sup>41</sup>

Next, we move on to a significant wordplay involving זכר and its antonym שכח, to remember and to forget, respectively.<sup>42</sup> After v. 7, the next occurrence of זכר is found in v. 13 where it is parallel to its negated antonym (i.e., לא־שכח): “For the one who seeks blood remembers them; he has not forgotten the cry of the afflicted.” Then in vv. 18-19 the wordplay between these two antonyms takes a satirical turn: the wicked/nations, those headed for Sheol, are described as those who “forget” (שכח) God. But in stark contrast to these wicked who will “perish forever” (v. 19) in Sheol, the poor will not forever be “forgotten” (שכח) and their “hope” will not “perish.” Here, we have the return of the word אבד (see vv. 4, 6 and 7) to complete the satirical word play in vv. 18-19. As explained by Klein and Sefati, in their discussion of wordplay in Sumerian literature: “Word play [sic] with its lexical ambiguity excites the curiosity of the listener or the reader and makes him alert so the listener can perceive the meaning intended by

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<sup>41</sup> See Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 118 and Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture* (2 vols; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926), 1:255-7 on the importance of “name” and “memory/memorial/mention” in ancient Israel.

<sup>42</sup> This wordplay is mentioned but not examined in detail by Konrad Schaefer, *Psalms* (BERIT OLAM; ed. David W. Cotter; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2001), 26.

the poet.”<sup>43</sup> Jakobson explains that ambiguity is in fact a signature characteristic of all poetry.<sup>44</sup>

The very memory of those who forget God will be destroyed and, in fact, those who forget God are said to “return to Sheol.” In stark contrast, the “poor”/ “needy”/ “afflicted ones” evidently do not forget God (see v. 11a) and they are not “forgotten”<sup>45</sup> by him (v. 19). Furthermore, their hope will not perish. This destiny is again stated in stark contrast to the “enemy”/ “nations”/ “wicked” and their very memory. Such satire has the effect of diminishing the power of the wicked enemy in the thinking of the audience of this psalm. Such satirical language also functions to contrast the fates of those who “forget God” with those who “are remembered” by God.<sup>46</sup> At the end of the day, there is a complete and profound “reversal” of fortunes. Brueggemann refers to a “social reversal” in which the “powerful wicked have been nullified, and the marginal [needy] have been given a

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<sup>43</sup> Noegel, ed., *Puns and Pundits* 26-27.

<sup>44</sup> Jakobson, “Linguistics,” *Selected Writings*, 3:42. See also Jakobson’s criticism of literary historians and aestheticians who putatively “know more about a poet than the poet himself” or who read a work of poetry as if they had “never heard of the age-old psychological principle of the ambivalence of feelings—no feeling is so pure to be free from contamination by its opposite feeling” in his “What is Poetry?” *Selected Writings* 3:742.

<sup>45</sup> In addition to the meaning “to forget/be forgotten,” in some texts שָׁכַח also seems to connote “to forsake/be forsaken” (see Isa 23:15-16; Jer 50:5-6; Pss 13:2; 31:13; 44:18; 45:11 [allusion to Gen 2:24?]; 74:19. If the idea of forsakenness or abandonment is the connotation here, then note the possible word play with עָזַב in Ps 9:11.

<sup>46</sup> See Brueggemann, “Psalms 9-10,” 221-22, who talks about this contrast in terms of the “juxtaposition” of זָכַר and שָׁכַח and of the “negative” and “positive” uses of these two terms. He also discusses the “negative” versus “positive” uses of the term אָבַד. Brueggemann’s focus, however, is not on identifying the type of poetic device(s) encountered here, but rather on the socio-theological meaning involved.

guaranteed social position.”<sup>47</sup> It is more accurate to describe this language as envisioning not just a social but also a theological (“divine”) reversal—a common biblical motif (1 Sam 2:4-9; Pss 73:13-21; 113:7-9; Job 42:7-9. Cf. Luke 1:51-53; 6:25; 16:25).

### *Psalm 10*

The first poetic device encountered in Ps 10 appears in the first verse and involves sarcasm. Sarcasm or sarcastic language is generally defined as bitter (and often, ironic<sup>48</sup>) language that is usually directed against an individual. Here, the target of sarcasm is Yahweh himself. The psalmist sarcastically repeats the phrase “in times of trouble” (לעתות בצרה, 9:10).<sup>49</sup> The context of the Ps 9 occurrence is one of stability, focusing on the abiding presence of Yahweh and the resultant security and protection that he provides (9:7-11). In sarcastic contrast, 10:1 describes Yahweh as “standing at a distance” and as “hiding” during times of trouble. The ironic repetition of the phrase לעתות בצרה underscores the poet’s sarcastic charge which is unmistakably directed to Yahweh (“Why, O Yahweh, are you . . . [why] are you . . . ?”). Ps 9:10 describes Yahweh as a

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>48</sup> Texts like Amos 4:4-5 (and Ps 10:1) are best described as employing sarcastic language. On Amos 4:4-5 as “sarcasm,” see Luis Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics* (StudBib 11; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1988), 160. Unfortunately, Schökel does not cite any Psalter texts as illustrations of irony, sarcasm or humor.

<sup>49</sup> Or perhaps, “times of drought.” See William L. Holladay, “Indications of Jeremiah’s Psalter,” *JBL* 121 (2002): 252.

**משגב**—a high, inaccessible stronghold<sup>50</sup> and yet in 10:1 he is no longer an inaccessible stronghold but simply inaccessible. The psalmist goes so far as to ask Yahweh (sarcastically, I might add): “(why) are you hiding (**עלם**) in times of trouble?”

Samuel Balentine suggests that such sarcasm (or actually, the whole lament) “provides a means of coping with the problem of God’s hiddenness which acts as a buffer against total skepticism.”<sup>51</sup> In other words, such sarcastic language functions in the middle of this unified poem as a kind of theological (or psychological) defense mechanism.

Sarcastic language directed against Yahweh is again employed in vv. 9, 11. Here the poet alludes to the 9:16 term **רשת** (“net”) and the term **שכח** (“to forget”) found in 9:13, 18 and 19. In Ps 9 the “net” catches the wicked, a display of Yahweh’s judgment for all to see (9:16-17). In Ps 9 the nations who “forget” God go to Sheol while the needy are not (ultimately) “forgotten” (9:18-19). In Ps 10, however, as Yahweh stands at a distance and even “hides,” the wicked person carries off the afflicted person after having drawn him into a net (v. 9). Similarly, 10:11 depicts the wicked person as secretly boasting that “God has forgotten”—a sentiment that apparently the psalmist shares

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<sup>50</sup> Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, “**משגב**; **שגב**,” *HALOT* 2:640; 3:1305-6.

<sup>51</sup> Samuel E. Balentine, *The Hidden God: The Hiding of the Face of God in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 167. See also Terrence Fretheim, *The Suffering of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 60-78, on the Old Testament concept and language of the absence of God. Compare J. Clinton McCann, Jr. *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: The Psalms as Torah* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993) and his comments on the two-fold occurrence of the hiphil of **רחק** (same root as in Ps 10:1: **מרחק**) in Ps 88:9, 19: “God has caused [note hiphil] the psalmist’s isolation! God is the problem (see also vv. 14, 16-17 [15, 17-18]), but God is also the solution. Even life’s worst has to do with God, and so the cry goes up out of the depths” (99).

(vv. 1-2a). The rhetorical impact of these two contrasting views of Yahweh's actions or of the results of his actions can be seen in the following chart.

TABLE 3  
POSITIVE VERSUS NEGATIVE VIEWS OF YAHWEH'S ACTIONS

Positive Action/Outcome	Negative Action/Outcome
"YHWH is a refuge...in times of trouble?" 9:10	"Why, O YHWH, are you...hidden in times of trouble," 10:1
"in the very net they hid, their feet were seized," 9:16	"When he draws him into his net, then the unfortunate person is crushed," 10:9-10
"but the needy person will not be forgotten forever," 9:19	"God has forgotten," "He has hidden his face," 10:11

This kind of speech directed toward Yahweh, brashly questioning the reasons for his failure to be present, seems inconceivable on the heels of Ps 9. And yet the language is here. Such sarcastic language directed towards Yahweh is, of course, found in several other places in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>52</sup> What is noteworthy here is the sharp contrast with Ps 9:4-11. Why such sarcasm after such praise of Yahweh's presence? The function of the sarcastic irony in 10:1 is: (1) to emphasize the fact (hinted at in 9:19-21) that the struggle of the faithful against enemies is an ongoing struggle and (2) the poet in Ps 9

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<sup>52</sup> Pss 13:2-3; 89:47; Job 9:15-22; Isa 45:15; Jer 20:7; this language is another link between prophecy and psalmody. See Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, 155-61. On the theological problem of God's absence, see Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978); Balentine, *Hidden God*. See also Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 317-19, 333-34. Compare Jakobson on the ambivalence of feelings as a common trait of world poetry in his "What is Poetry?" *Selected Writings*, 3:742.

affirms Yahweh's total destruction of his enemies (vv. 4-7) but then quickly turns a concerned eye towards new threats (vv. 14, 20-21).

A second poetic device appears in 10:3. This device consists of two additional plays on words, though of a different sort than those already encountered. First, the wicked is said to "boast"<sup>53</sup> (הלל) of the desire of his heart. The root הלל usually refers to the act of praise and that praise is in the Psalter most frequently directed towards Yahweh, his name or his word.<sup>54</sup> There is a third meaning of the root that means "to boast," but this meaning occurs with the root in the qal, poel, poal or hithpael and not in the piel as in 10:3.<sup>55</sup> H. Ringgren calls the piel occurrence of this root in 10:3 "obscure," but to his credit he also sticks with the translation ". . .praises the desire of his heart"<sup>56</sup> rather than the more popular translation ". . .boasts of the desire of his heart." The latter translation, followed by the major English translations, obscures the ironic play on words found here. The Psalter, in its approximately 104 uses of הלל in the piel, always refers to God, his

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<sup>53</sup> As translated by the majority of English translations: KJV, ASV, NAS, NAB, RSV, NIV, NRSV; cf. *The Jerusalem Bible* (rev. and ed. Harold Fisch; Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 1997); NJPS reads: "The wicked crows about his unbridled lusts."

<sup>54</sup> See Pss 84:5; 22:23; 35:18; 107:32; 109:30; 69:31; 149:3; 150:1-6; 117:1; 147:12; 146:1-2; 56:5, 11; 74:21; 113:1; 119:171; 148:1-5ff and passim. In a couple of texts, הלל is used in tandem with ברך ("to bless"), which is also a significant term in 10:3.

<sup>55</sup> H. Cazelles, "הלל/hll III," *TDOT* 3:411-13.

<sup>56</sup> Helmer Ringgren, "הלל/hll I and II," *TDOT*, 3:406. Similarly, L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, ed., *A Bilingual Dictionary of the Hebrew and Aramaic Old Testament: English and German* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1958) lists 10:3 occurrence under piel ("to praise") but recognizes the anomaly: "? Ps 10,3" (235).

name, or his word as the object of praise.<sup>57</sup> But here in 10:3, the poet uses הלל (piel) to describe the extent of this person's wickedness—he does not “praise” Yahweh, Yahweh's name, or Yahweh's word. Instead, he praises the desire of his own soul.

The effect of this verbal irony is to emphasize the narcissism of this wicked person who praises himself rather than Yahweh who alone is “worthy to be praised” (Ps 18:4). With respect to the earlier discussed rubric of “motivations”—a key element of the psalms of disorientation—this description of the wicked will hopefully so offend the honor of Yahweh that he will have no other choice than to stop hiding, rise up and “lift up his hand” (v. 12).

The second ironic wordplay in 10:3 involves the root ברך. This root consistently means “to bless” and when used with God/Yahweh as the object is actually a synonym of הלל.<sup>58</sup> And yet here in 10:3, as in a few other biblical texts, the root is used euphemistically for the Hebrew words meaning “to curse.”<sup>59</sup> Although the text is difficult, it seems to me that ברך is here parallel to the next word נאץ (also a piel), which

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<sup>57</sup> H. Ringgren, “הלל/hll I and II,” *TDOT*, 3:404-10. After surveying similar Semitic cognates, he also says of this root: “We are probably dealing with an onomatopoetic word” (404).

<sup>58</sup> Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT* 1:160, piel, (4.): Pss 66:8; 68:27; 103:1-2, 20-22; 104:1, 35 etc. Cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *BDB*, 138-9: “bless God, adore with bended knees.”

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 139; Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT* 1:160, (6.). Compare Job 1:5, 11; 2:5, 9.

means “to spurn,” “to treat with disrespect.”<sup>60</sup> The irony of this euphemistic use of בָּרַךְ underscores the depravity of the wicked/greedy person. Grammatically, the rare asyndetic construction<sup>61</sup> with these two piel verbs (הוּחַ וְנָאץ בָּרַךְ) also seems to intensify or heighten the poetry. The English translations, however, weaken the power of the rhetoric. In this case, by adding the conjunction “and” (for example, RSV et al.: “. . . curses and renounces the LORD”).

What additional motivation is needed for Yahweh to rise up and destroy the wicked than for his own person to be cursed and rejected? One last note is in order before leaving v. 3. Interestingly, the roots בָּרַךְ and הָלַל are also juxtaposed in Ps 145:2 which is the eighth of the eight alphabetic acrostics in the Hebrew Psalter. Ps 9/10 is, of course, the first of the eight acrostics.<sup>62</sup>

In 10:4 one finds the first occurrence of the term דָּרַשׁ in this half of Ps 9/10. This term, along with the term שָׁכַח, serves to tie the two parts of Ps 9/10 together. There is also a certain amount of symmetry or paralleling in the repetition of these terms in the two halves of this poem. First, in 9:11 the reader meets those who “seek” (דָּרַשׁ) YHWH.

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<sup>60</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *BDB*, 610-11 and Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT* 2:658 respectively.

<sup>61</sup> Joüon, *Grammar*, 2:649-53 (sect. 177m). In this section, Joüon supports use of asyndesis for emphasis.

<sup>62</sup> The only other juxtaposition of these two terms is found in Ps 115:17-18. Of course in this text and in Ps 145, the terms are used with their usual meaning of “to praise” and “to bless.”

They know his name and put their trust in him. In contrastive parallel, **שׁוֹרֵשׁ** is repeated in 10:4 and used to describe the wicked who do not “seek.”<sup>63</sup>

Second, 9:13 specifically says that [YHWH, v. 12] “seeks” (**שׁוֹרֵשׁ**) blood. Here the term is best translated “requires” or “requires an accounting for” blood.<sup>64</sup> Once more, in contrastive parallel, the wicked person erroneously says that God will not “seek” or require an accounting according to 10:13 (cf. v. 15b). Then finally, in Ps 9 the contrast between the wicked, “Sheol-bound” nations who “forget” (**שָׁכַח**) God (9:18) and God who does not “forget” the afflicted (9:13, 19) is repeated in Ps 10. The wicked person again states, erroneously, that God has “forgotten” (**שָׁכַח אֵל**) (10:11). Ironically, the fact is that while the wicked may indeed “forget” (9:18), Yahweh, in contrast, can be expected not to “forget” (10:12).

The repetition of these terms across the two halves of Ps 9/10 serves to further emphasize the connection of the two parts semantically just as the use of the acrostic pattern ties the two together visually. According to Balentine, another way to look at these contrasts is to read Ps 10 (a lament) as a point-by-point counter-statement of many of the statements of confidence in Ps 9 (a song of praise). He sees this language as one of

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<sup>63</sup> Is the unstated object God (per KJV, NAU, NIV, RSV) or “blood” (per 9:13)? Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, opts for the latter, translating: “The wicked man [thinks] arrogantly: ‘He does not avenge; there is no God . . .’” (189, 197; cf. 195 on 9:13). In the overall context of 9:11, 13, 10:4 both are possible and it seems best to be inclusive rather than exclusive and to leave the ambiguity by simply translating “. . . does not seek . . .” The LXX seems to preserve the ambiguity of the “objectless” verb **שׁוֹרֵשׁ**: “παρωξυνεν τον κυριον ο αμαρτωλος κατα το πληθος της οργης αυτου/ ουκ εκζητησει ουκ εστιν ο θεος ενωπιον αυτου/”

<sup>64</sup> Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT* 1:233.

the ways in which the psalmists protest their innocence or make it clear (to Yahweh?) that they are not deserving of the evil they are experiencing.<sup>65</sup>

This parallelism is not, however, found within the lines of a colon but instead stretched over the two parts of a unified poem. This fact can be better appreciated when represented graphically as in the following table.

TABLE 4

## POINT-BY-POINT COUNTERSTATEMENTS IN THE TWO HALVES OF PS 9/10

Ps 9 Statement	Ps 10 Contrastive Parallel
“those who know your name...are seeking you,” v. 11	“the wicked person...will not seek,” v. 4
“the one who seeks blood remembers them,” v. 13	“He says in his heart, ‘You will never seek,’” v. 13
“(YHWH) does not forget the outcry of the afflicted...the needy person will not be forgotten forever,” vv. 13, 19	“He says in his heart, ‘God has forgotten,’” v. 11

In verses 6 and 15 of Ps 10 there is a subtle ironic wordplay involving two meanings of the term **רע**. In v. 6, the wicked person (cf. v. 4) says in his heart “I shall never be moved; generation after generation I will not be *in evil* (**ברע**).” Here the term is best

<sup>65</sup> Balentine, *Hidden God*, 54-55. In contrast to these readings of the repetition and parallelism is that of A. Weiser who posits a celebration of the feast of Yahweh’s covenant as the “occasion when the psalm was recited.” He says: “The alternating forms and thoughts in Psalm 9 and likewise also the closing verses of both psalms [Pss 9 and 10] which run parallel, are to be accounted for in this way—by their connection with the range of ideas actualized by the cultic liturgy” in Artur Weiser, *The Psalms* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 149.

translated “in a bad situation.”<sup>66</sup> The irony enters the picture as one continues to read the psalm. In v. 15 one reads that in fact this wicked person is himself evil (עָרָב). He may arrogantly boast that he will never be moved and never be in a bad situation (literally, be “in evil,” v. 6) but the truth is that *he* is evil (v.15). Not to sound trite, but this wicked person may say he will never be in evil but actually the evil is in him. In the psalmist’s view, the wicked person’s ignorance of his true condition is largely due to the fact that Yahweh’s judgments are high above him, removed from him (v. 5).

One particularly interesting poetic device of Ps 10 is the reported speech and/or thoughts of the wicked person (vv. 4, 6, 11, 13). This technique, which is common in Hebrew narrative, is not found in the first part of the poem (Ps 9). This technique does appear in many other poems throughout the Psalter, predominately in Books I-III, although no other psalm displays proportionately as much reported speech of the wicked enemies as does Ps 10.<sup>67</sup>

What is the rhetorical significance of this reported speech? Reported speech is a technique of characterization used frequently in Hebrew narrative.<sup>68</sup> W. R. Tate refers to

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<sup>66</sup> Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT* 3:1252, (4.a.).

<sup>67</sup> See Pss 2:2-3; 3:3; 4:7; 11:1; 12:5; 13:5; 14:1//53:1; 22:8-9; 35:21; 40:16; 41:6, 8-9; 42:4, 11; 59:8; 64:6; 70:4; 71:11; 73:11; 74:8; 78:19; 79:10; 83:5, 13; 94:7; 115:2; and 137:3, 7.

<sup>68</sup> Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield, England: Almond, 1983), 23-42. In this chapter on “Character and Characterization,” Berlin discusses the three main types of characters in biblical narrative and then lists the techniques used in characterization. See also Herbert J. Levine, *Sing Unto God a New Song: A Contemporary Reading of the Psalms* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 118-22; Cynthia L. Miller, *The Representation of Speech in Biblical Hebrew Narrative* (HSM 55; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 290-96, 399, and Claus Westermann, “Struktur und Geschichte der Klage im Alten Testament” *ZAW* 66 (1954): 62-63.

this technique as interiorization. The narrator (or in this case, poet) “supplies the reader with windows into the emotional state of a character.”<sup>69</sup> This information is provided in a couple of ways: (1) the narrator reveals the character’s thoughts or opinions or (2) the narrator reports by means of direct quotation the character’s speech. Both of these techniques appear in Ps 10. In v. 4 the poet reports the wicked person’s thoughts and in vv. 6, 11, 13 the poet reports direct speech, introduced in each case by the root **אמר**.

The purpose of such interiorization is two-fold: it enables a reader to make judgments about a character’s inner motivation and it aids the reader in “filling out” the character.<sup>70</sup> More specific to Ps 10, Brueggemann argues that the purpose of such interiorization is to empower the weak:

. . . in the rhetoric of this psalm, the wicked are not in fact permitted to speak for themselves but are at the mercy of those who seize the chance to speak for them. This remarkable rhetorical strategy of the psalmist places the wicked in an odd and unusual circumstance. The wicked (who are also the strong) are accustomed to speaking for themselves so that they may carefully choose what they say and what they deliberately withhold—what they want to leave unsaid.<sup>71</sup>

Brueggemann hints at the occurrence of irony in the act of this reported speech, although he does not specifically mention irony. It is ironic that the wicked are placed at the “mercy” of the afflicted who receive no mercy from the enemies. This reported speech functions in such a way as to depict the wicked person making ridiculously arrogant statements in the face of God. The wicked person is thus described in an

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<sup>69</sup> W. Randolph Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach* (rev. ed.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997), 91. Cf. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 37-38.

<sup>70</sup> Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 92.

<sup>71</sup> Brueggemann, “Ps 9-10,” 226.

unfavorable light with the result that his/her power is diminished and the reader of the psalm can feel, along with the psalmist, that Yahweh will act righteously and reverse the fortunes of the wicked and the afflicted. Also, as with the sarcastic language noted earlier in 10:1, Levine points out that the quotation of the words of the wicked is also directed towards God:

The psalmists quote the words of the wicked in poems addressed to God, yet presumably, an omniscient God knows what the wicked say. The psalmists do so in order to challenge God, in the presence of the assembled community, to overturn the words of the wicked.<sup>72</sup>

In 10:11, 14 there is two-fold repetition of a keyword from 9:14, the first part of the poem. This repetition serves to tie together the two sections of the overall poem just as was the case with the terms *דָּרַשׁ* (9:11, 13; 10:4, 13) and *שָׁכַח* (9:13, 18, 19; 10:11,12) as noted earlier in this chapter. The keyword in 9:14 is *רָאֵה* (“Be gracious to me, O Yahweh; *see* my affliction from those who hate me . . .”). Both halves of Ps 9/10 include three entreaties for Yahweh to take some specific action on behalf of the afflicted (compare 9:14a-b, 20a-b, 21a-b with 10:2b, 12a-b, 15a-b). Verse 14 contains the first of these entreaties.

The word *רָאֵה* in Ps 10, while not occurring in one of these last three entreaties, does nevertheless function to tie Ps 9 to Ps 10 thematically or theologically. In 9:14, Yahweh is beseeched to “see” the affliction imposed by the wicked. Then in contrastive parallel, 10:11 represents the wicked person as arrogantly saying that God will “never *see* it” (*בִּלְרָאֵה לֹנֹצֵחַ*). In 10:14, however, the righteous psalmist takes heart in the fact that Yahweh *has* actually *seen* despite the pompous expectation of the wicked. Such

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<sup>72</sup> Levine, *Sing Unto God*, 188-9.

“point/counter-point/resolution” has the effect of subtly emphasizing the original request for Yahweh to “see” the psalmist’s affliction. This pattern of repetition is the same one found earlier in connection with **שׁוֹרֵץ**: those who trust Yahweh seek him and Yahweh “seeks.” The wicked person does not seek and says that God does not seek either; but in the end, Yahweh will “seek out wickedness” until he finds no more to seek (9:11, 13; 10:4, 13, 15). A similar pattern of repetition also occurs with **שׁוֹכַח**: Yahweh does not forget in spite of the fact that the wicked person claims that God does forget; the wicked person does in fact forget; but again, in the end, Yahweh does *not* forget (9:13, 19, 18; 10:12).

Finally, in 10:16, 18 there is a repetition of the term **אֶרֶץ**. The term may not, however, carry the same connotation in these two verses. Verse 16 says, “nations have perished from *his land* (**מֵאֶרֶץ**)” or this term could be translated “. . . from his earth.” A quick survey of the usages of this term in the Psalter reveals that this root is often used with two different connotations in the same context (Pss 44:4, 26; 63:2, 10; 74:7, 8, 12, 17, 20; 78:12, 69; 85:2, 10, 12, 13; 89:12, 28, 40, 45; 105:7, 11, 16, 23, 27, 30, 32, 35, 36, 44; 106:17, 22, 24, 27, 38; 135:6, 7, 12; 136:6, 21; 143:3, 6, 10; 147:6, 8, 15). In 10:16, the term should most likely be translated “land” and then translated “earth” in v. 18.

### *Summary*

The term “land” is thematically important in Ps 9/10 because it helps link this psalm to Ps 37—the acrostic in Book I of the Psalter that refers frequently to the “land” as the inheritance of those who trust in Yahweh (37:3, 9, 11, 22, 29, 34). What is interesting about this fact is that Ps 9/10 and Ps 37 are *metrically* and *structurally* similar as pointed

out by Freedman.<sup>73</sup> Thus the two-fold occurrence of אָרָץ in Ps 10<sup>74</sup> is another similarity or link between these two acrostic poems. When we come to the chapter on Ps 37, it will then be appropriate to compare/contrast the statements about the land in Ps 9/10 with the statements found in Ps 37. One additional theological link between these two acrostics should be noted. Levine observes that Ps 10:1, with its question “Why, O Yahweh, do you stand far off; Why do you hide in times of trouble?” introduces the concept of God’s apparent “hiddenness” and indifference towards evil—a key motif in literature dealing with the issue of theodicy.<sup>75</sup> Of course, Ps 37 is a wisdom psalm which, like Ps 73, deals extensively with the theological conundrum of theodicy.

### *Translation*

#### *9:1-21*

1: For the overseer. Upon the death of the son. A psalm of David.

2: **I**<sup>76</sup> will give thanks, O Yahweh, with all of my heart; **I** will recount all your wonderful deeds.

3: **I** will be glad and **I** will rejoice in you; **I** will sing to your name, O Most High!

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<sup>73</sup> David N. Freedman, with Jeffrey C. Geoghegan, and Andrew Welch, *Psalms 119: The Exaltation of Torah* (BJS 6; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 2-3.

<sup>74</sup> Note that the term only appears one time in the other two acrostics in Book I (25:13; 34:17).

<sup>75</sup> Levine, *Sing Unto God*, 170.

<sup>76</sup> The boldface print is used in an effort to signify the fact that each of the four bicolae in these verses begins with the letter א and all five of the verbs used in vv. 2-3 are cohortatives that end with a paragogic ך. Cf. Jan de Waard, “Hebrew Rhetoric and the Translator,” in *Literary Structure and Rhetorical Strategies in the Hebrew Bible* (ed. L. J. de Regt, J. de Waard and J. P. Fokkelman; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 243.

4: When my enemies are turned back, they will stumble and be destroyed from before your face

5: For you maintained my case and my plea you sit on the throne judging righteously.

6: You rebuked nations, you destroyed the wicked. Their name you wiped out forever and ever.

7: The enemy comes to complete, perpetual desolation and his cities you uprooted; the very memory of them is destroyed.

8: But YHWH remains forever. He has established his throne for judgment.

9: He governs the world in righteousness; he judges the peoples in uprightness.

10: Now YHWH is an inaccessible refuge for the oppressed; an inaccessible refuge in times of distress

11: and so those who know your name put their trust in you because you, O YHWH, have not abandoned those who are seeking you.

12: Sing to YHWH who dwells in Zion! Make known his deeds among the peoples!

13: For the one who seeks blood remembers them—he does not forget the outcry of the afflicted.

14: Bestow grace upon me, O YHWH. Look at my affliction from those who hate me, (O you) who raises me up from the gates of death,

15: so that I may recount all your praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion. I will take joy in your salvation.

16: The nations have sunk down in the pit they made; in the very net they hid, their feet were seized.

17: YHWH has made himself known; he has executed judgment. In the deed of his own hand the wicked person is snared. Higgayon. Selah.

18: The wicked ones shall “return” to Sheol; all the nations that have *forgotten* God

19: but the needy person will *not be forgotten*<sup>77</sup> forever, nor the hope of the afflicted ones ever be destroyed.

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<sup>77</sup> The italic print is used here and in v. 18 to highlight the repeated root שכח.

20: Rise up, O YHWH, do not allow *humanity* to become strong. Let the nations be judged before your face.

21: Put the fear in them, O YHWH. Let the nations know that they are *human*.<sup>78</sup>  
Selah.

10:1-18

1: Why, O YHWH, are you standing at a distance—hidden in times of trouble?

2: In pride the wicked person hotly pursues the afflicted person. Let them be caught in the schemes that they have devised,

3: because the wicked person praises the desire of his soul; the greedy person curses and despises YHWH.

4: The wicked person according to the haughtiness of his face will not seek. “There is no God” are all his schemes.

5: His ways are stable at all times; your judgments are on high, removed from him. As for all his enemies—he blows them off.

6: He says in his heart: “I will not be moved. Generation after generation I will not be in *bad*<sup>79</sup> circumstances.”

7: His mouth is full of curses and treacherous words and deceit. Under his tongue are hardship and iniquity.

8: He sits in ambush in the villages; in *hiding* places he slaughters the innocent. His eyes *lie in wait for*<sup>80</sup> the unfortunate person.

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<sup>78</sup> Italics are used here and in v. 20 to note that the Hebrew word in both verses is the same: אָנוּשׁ.

<sup>79</sup> Note the play on words here between רַע (from רָעַע) and רָשָׁע. Ironically, the “wicked/evil person” (vv. 2, 3, 4) says in v. 6: “I will not be in *evil/bad* circumstances.”

<sup>80</sup> Cf. textual note in *BHS* and also Ps 37:32.

9: He lies in ambush in a *hiding* place. Like a lion in its den he lies in ambush to *seize and carry off*<sup>81</sup> the afflicted person. He seizes and carries off the afflicted person. When he draws him into his net

10: then the unfortunate person is *crushed*, he *bows down*, and he *falls* in his mighty strength.<sup>82</sup>

11: He says in his heart: “God has forgotten;” “He has *hidden* his face;” “He will never see.”

12: Arise, O YHWH! O God, lift up your hand! Do not forget the afflicted ones.

13: Why does the wicked person despise God? He says in his heart: “You will never seek.”<sup>83</sup>

14: You do see, for you observe hardship and grief in order to take it into your hand. The unfortunate person has *entrusted*<sup>84</sup> himself to you. You are a support to the fatherless.

15: Break the arm of the wicked and evil person. *Seek out*<sup>85</sup> his wickedness until you find none.

16: YHWH is king forever and ever. The nations are destroyed from his land.

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<sup>81</sup> The Hebrew verb is **הטף**. The only other occurrences of this term in the Bible are in the last half of this verse and in Judg 21:21.

<sup>82</sup> Compare a similar piling up of synonyms for poetic effect in the Song of Deborah (Jdg. 5:27).

<sup>83</sup> Note the ambiguity of **שׂרד**. Compare ambiguity in v. 4. Again, it seems best here to translate “seek” without a supplied object and thus preserve the poet’s ambiguity. In the context, however, the reader is reminded of the irony that though the wicked person says to himself that God does not seek, in reality, God is the “seeker/avenger” of blood (9:13). See also Ps 10:15b.

<sup>84</sup> Hebrew: **עזב**. This verb is used in the sense of “abandon,” “leave,” or “fail” in every other occurrence in the Psalter (see: Pss 9:11; 16:10; 22:2; 27:9, 10; 37:8, 25, 28, 33; 38:11, 22; 40:13; 49:11; 71:9, 11, 18; 89:31; 94:14; 119:8, 53, and 87. The derivative meaning of “commit” or “entrust” (literally, “abandon” oneself to someone’s care or protection) found here in v. 14 also occurs in Gen 39:6; Job 39:11.

<sup>85</sup> Reading the imperfect tense functioning as an imperative. See Joüon, *Grammar*, 2:372 (sec. 113, m).

17: The *desire*<sup>86</sup> of the afflicted ones you have heard, O YHWH. You will strengthen their heart; your ear will listen carefully

18: to do justice for the fatherless and the oppressed<sup>87</sup> so that *humankind*, who is from the earth, may never again terrify.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Contrast the negative connotation of "desire" (תאווה) in v. 3.

<sup>87</sup> See the insightful comment by Lewis, *Inspirational Writings*, 138 (in speaking about the "age-old and almost world-wide experience" of the poor person having difficulty getting his day in court): "In most places and times it has been very difficult for the 'small man' to get his case heard. The judge . . . has to be bribed. If you can't afford to 'oil his palm' your case will never reach court. . . We need not therefore be surprised if the Psalms, and the Prophets, are full of the longing for judgment, and regard the announcement that 'judgment' is coming as good news." Compare Brueggemann, "Psalms 9-10," 220-21.

<sup>88</sup> Note the possible play on sound between the terms "terrify" (עריך) and "earth" (ארץ).

## CHAPTER THREE

### Psalm 25

#### *Overview*

This second of the acrostic psalms in Book I is distinct from Ps 9/10 in terms of structure. Whereas in Ps 9/10 there are two lines/stanzas for each consecutive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, in Ps 25 there is only one line per consecutive letter of the alphabet. This pattern also appears in Ps 34 and thus, structurally Pss 25 and 34 are parallel as are Pss 9/10 and 37. This observation about structure was made by Freedman in his study of Ps 119.<sup>1</sup> Psalms 25 and 34 are also linked structurally in another way. Both of these poems, after completing their twenty-two letter acrostic pattern, add an additional א line as the very last line of the poem. Thus in both Pss 25 and 34, the name of the first letter of the alphabet (*aleph*) is spelled out by the initial consonants of the first (א) line, the middle or ב line and the final line or verse beginning with the additional א.

A. Ceresko refers to this pattern as evidence of “alphabetic thinking” over and above the more obvious alphabetic acrostic pattern that runs throughout the psalm.<sup>2</sup> R. Murphy

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<sup>1</sup> David N. Freedman, with Jeffrey C. Geoghegan, and Andrew Welch, *Psalm 119: The Exaltation of Torah* (BJS 6; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony R. Ceresko, “The ABCs of Wisdom in Psalm XXXIV,” *VT* 35 (1985): 100. Cf. Patrick W. Skehan, “The Structure of the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy (Deut 32:1-43),” *CBQ* 13 (1951): 160, n. 13: “In the word *aleph* are contained three consonants: the first in the alphabet; the twelfth, *lamed*, which in the twenty-two letter sequence begins the second half of the alphabet; and the ‘extra’ letter, *pe*. By going from *aleph* to *taw* and then adding *pe*, one makes *lamed* the exact middle of the series and

suggests that the poet omitted the 1 line deliberately so as to make the 7 line the center of the psalm, after the addition of the final 5 verse.<sup>3</sup> One cannot prove, of course, whether this omission was deliberate or intentional. R. Jakobson does, however, bring a different insight into the whole discussion of intentionality and is therefore quoted here at length:

Whenever and wherever I discuss the phonological and grammatical texture of poetry, and whatever the language and epoch of the poems examined, one question constantly arises among the readers or listeners: are the designs disclosed by linguistic analysis deliberately and rationally planned in the creative work of the poet and is he really aware of them? A calculus of probability as well as an accurate comparison of poetic texts with other kinds of verbal messages demonstrates that the striking particularities in the poetic selection, accumulation, juxtaposition, distribution and exclusion of diverse phonological and grammatical classes cannot be viewed as negligible accidentals governed by the rule of chance. Any significant poetic composition, whether it is an improvement or the fruit of long and painstaking labor, implies a goal-oriented choice of verbal material.<sup>4</sup>

Jakobson goes on to introduce the concept of *intuition* as a possible explanation of these

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sum of the whole alphabet in the name of its first letter.” Ceresko points out the significance of the *lamed* line being made the central panel, so to speak, when he notes that the *lamed* verse (34:12) “contains the verbal stem *lmd* ‘to learn, teach’” (100). Such is not the case, however, with the 7 verse in Ps 25. It should be noted that the alphabetic acrostic in Sir 51:13-30 also contains an additional 5 line at the close of the poem (v. 30). See Patrick W. Skehan and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (AB 39; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1987), 572-77.

<sup>3</sup> Lothar Ruppert, “Psalm 25 und die Grenze kultorientierter Psalmenexegese,” *ZAW* 84 (1972): 579; Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature* (3d ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 10. K. C. Hanson, “Alphabetic Acrostics: A Form Critical Study” (Ph.D. diss., The Claremont Graduate School, 1984), points out that we do not know if the line in question was omitted on purpose or not by suggesting that “perhaps the loss (or non-existence?) of the *waw* line provoked later tradents to fulfill the 22-line schema by adding an additional line at the end” (47).

<sup>4</sup> Roman Jakobson, “Subliminal Verbal Patterning in Poetry” in *Language in Literature* (ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1987), 250.

artistic components that “the poet and his receptive reader nevertheless spontaneously apprehend.”<sup>5</sup>

This entire discussion emphasizes the fact that the alphabetic acrostic pattern in these psalms should not automatically be seen as an “artificial structure,” slavishly and unimaginatively followed by the psalmists.<sup>6</sup> Whether one prefers the term intention or intuition<sup>7</sup> one should at least be open to the idea that these psalmists are artists—using not palette and brush but instead letters of the alphabet and words to express themselves and their faith in Yahweh. N. H. Ridderbos correctly argues that the supposed restrictive or hindering aspects of the acrostic pattern (upon the creativity of the poet) is largely

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>6</sup> Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59* (trans. Hilton C. Oswald; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1988), after agreeing with H. Gunkel’s claim that the author is mastered by the alphabetic pattern, writes: “Repetitions are not infrequent, and a clear organization cannot be undertaken because of the lack of progress in thought” (319). Cf. Michael D. Coogan, ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical Books* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) in its annotations on Ps 25: “This artificial pattern accounts for the absence of any clear, logical structure, although the psalm has most of the elements of the typical lament . . .” In contrast, see Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Traditional Techniques in Classical Hebrew Verse* (JSOTSup 170; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 17: “One purpose of such poems was to include everything ‘from *aleph* to *taw*’ . . . Another purpose may have been to impose some sort of order on seemingly disparate elements. An additional implication is that acrostics poems . . . should be interpreted as complete units and not as mere compilations.”

<sup>7</sup> Intuition may be a better term than intention. Jakobson’s point is that whether conscious or unconscious (subliminal), poetic compositions by their very nature involve “goal-oriented choice of verbal material.” In the same essay, he further points out that: “Phonology and grammar of oral poetry offer a system of complex and elaborate correspondences which come into being, take effect, and are handed down through generations without anyone’s cognizance of the rules governing this intricate network” (see Jakobson, “Subliminal,” *Language in Literature*, 251, 261).

overstated.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, L. Ruppert, in the first of three claims about Ps 25, argues that “Ps 25 is a literary composition . . . more of a literary art form than it is bound to a cultic-produced genre.”<sup>9</sup> The important point here is to note that the structural aspects of Ps 25 are not incidental, but part of the poetics of the psalm.

### *Inter-textual Links*

In addition to formal structure, there is another literary device in 25:1, 13 that functions to tie Ps 25 to Ps 34 thematically. This device is the repetition of the term נפש (self, person, “unfettered desire”).<sup>10</sup> This term is quite frequent in the Psalter, appearing approximately 141 times. It is not frequently found, however, in the alphabetic acrostic psalms. In fact, the term נפש occurs only in Pss 10, 25, 34 and 119; and in these

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<sup>8</sup> N. H. Ridderbos, “The Psalms: Style-Figures and Structure (certain considerations with special reference to Pss xxii, xxv, and xlv),” *OtSt* 13 (1963): 61.

<sup>9</sup> Ruppert, “Psalm 25”: “Ps 25 is eine literarische Komposition . . . mehr an eine literarische Kunstform als an eine kultbezogene Gattung gebunden . . .” (578) [my translation].

<sup>10</sup> See Hans W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1974; reprint, Mifflintown, Penn: Sigler, 1996), 21-25. For “unfettered desire,” see p. 25. Other suggested English translations for this difficult term are: “life” (22); synonymous with “heart, flesh, spirit” (24); “I, me, myself” (23). On the latter, Wolff correctly notes: “Although we translate [*nephesh*] this way as a general rule, the factual difference in the Hebrew should remain clear: the ‘I’ is brought out in relief through [*nephesh*] with its centre in the person, with whose life the Yahwist has been concerned since the definition of Gen. 2.7 . . . it is important for the whole feeling of the language for us to keep in mind the total range of meaning, from neck . . . down to life and person” (23-24).

acrostics this term occurs only fourteen times.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the initial occurrences of **נפש** in Pss 25 and 34 are somewhat parallel with regard to their uses in the literary message of each poem. In Ps 25:1, one reads: “. . . to you, O Yahweh, my self (desire/longing) I lift up.” In Ps 34:3, **נפש** also occurs with the first person singular affirmative (“in Yahweh my desire makes its boast”). Also, in both of these “structurally parallel” acrostics, the second occurrence of the term refers to the desire of the righteous person(s) who are fearing and serving Yahweh: “his *self* [i.e., the man who fears Yahweh, v. 12] will dwell in goodness . . .” (25:13) and “Yahweh redeems the *desire* of his servants . . .” (34:23).

### *Specific Artistic Components*

The acrostic pattern is relatively well preserved in Ps 25 without as many lacunae as occur in Ps 9/10. A few key words are repeated in this psalm and these terms have been noted in earlier studies.<sup>12</sup> Part of the focus in this present study is to highlight the ways in which these repeated key words function to contribute to the rhetorical beauty and literary message of Ps 25. Long ago, M. Buber emphasized the importance of *repetition* as a rhetorical device in the psalms:

Repetition is a basic law of composition in the Psalms. Thus the Psalter provides its own interpretation, by repetition of what is important. This

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<sup>11</sup> Pss 10:3; 25:1, 13, 20; 34:2, 23; 119:20, 25, 28, 81, 109, 129, 167, 175. It is interesting to note that this term occurs eight times in Ps 119 in view of Freedman’s comments about the importance of the number “eight” in Ps 119 (see Freedman, *Psalms 119*, 1, 25, 29).

<sup>12</sup> Hanson, “Alphabetic Acrostics,” 52, 59; Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50* (WBC 19; Waco: Word, 1983), 218.

is why [the Psalter] often refuses to vary the expression of a certain subject.<sup>13</sup>

This reading of Ps 25 will also highlight the role of other artistic components in contributing to the literary beauty of the song.

Psalm 25 has the distinction (canonically) of being the first of several poems in Book I of the Psalter in which the psalmist confesses or admits personal sin and iniquity (Ps 25:7, 11, 18). In all of the psalms preceding Ps 25, the psalmists do not “stand in the path/way of sinners” but are instead completely innocent of any kind of transgression. And in the poem following Ps 25, Psalm 26, Book I returns to the theme of unmitigated blamelessness on the part of the psalmists. They are the afflicted righteous and they are afflicted by the wicked who alone sin against Yahweh.

In Ps 25, however, there is a clear shift theologically. If one is reading the Psalter as a book, “from the beginning,”<sup>14</sup> Psalm 25 muddies the water ideologically. This psalm introduces the idea that the world is not neatly divided into the “way of the righteous” versus the “way of the wicked” in the eyes of Yahweh (see Ps 1:6). In reality, Ps 25 can be read as a stark contrast not just to Ps 1 but also to Ps 9/10—the first acrostic psalm and a poem that continues the strict dichotomy between “wicked” and “righteous.” As will be seen later, the poet of Ps 25 uses repetition and the acrostic pattern to emphasize this

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<sup>13</sup> Martin Buber, *Good and Evil* (New York, N.Y.: Scribner, 1953), 52. See also Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 1985), 190 and W. G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (JSOTSup 26; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 193.

<sup>14</sup> Nancy L. DeClaisse-Walford, *Reading from the Beginning: The Shaping of the Hebrew Psalter* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1997).

important theological shift in the Psalter—a shift that is reflected and developed in later Book I psalms.<sup>15</sup>

There is a strategic placement of the thrice-repeated term נִפְשׁוּ within Ps 25. First, the term occurs in the opening verse (v. 1)—a hint that this poem will be intensely personal in its confessional language and content. Second, the term reoccurs in v. 13—close to the middle of the poem and then finally, the third occurrence comes in v. 20 near the end of the psalm.<sup>16</sup> In this way, not only is Yahweh underscored as the complete or perfect refuge for the psalmist—the servant who fears Yahweh—but also the completeness of the poem *in toto* is subtly confirmed. That is, the repetition of *soul* at three strategic places (beginning, middle and end) emphasizes the idea of completeness in addition to the idea of completeness conveyed by the acrostic pattern. This meta-message of completeness suggested by the acrostic pattern, noted above in chapter two, is pointed to by J. F. Brug as a major similarity between the biblical alphabetic acrostic poems and the Egyptian “numerically sequenced” poems.<sup>17</sup> Brug seeks to call attention

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<sup>15</sup> See: Pss 31:11; 32:1-5; 38:4, 19; 39:12; 41:5. Craigie highlights v. 11 by placing it as the focal point of an overall chiasmic structure found in the poem in his *Psalms 1-50*, 218. The poem’s chiasmic structure was noted earlier by Ruppert, “Psalm 25,” 579.

<sup>16</sup> On the significance of the number “three” in the Hebrew Bible, see Marvin H. Pope, “Number, Numbering, Numbers,” in *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (ed. G. A. Buttrick; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1962), 3:564-65.

<sup>17</sup> John F. Brug, “Biblical Acrostics and Their Relationship to Other Ancient Near Eastern Acrostics,” 296-7 in *The Bible in the Light of Cuneiform Literature* (ed. William W. Hallo, Bruce W. Jones and Gerald L. Mattingly; Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990).

to the importance of Egyptian acrostic literature as a more probable source (more probable than Mesopotamian acrostics) behind the biblical acrostics.<sup>18</sup>

In verse 3 of Ps 25 there is a poetical device that involves the double occurrence of the root **בּוּשׁ** (“to be ashamed”<sup>19</sup>). The editors of *BHS*, in a textual note, suggest that this repetition is a scribal error—a case of dittography.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, there is another way of reading this verse. In a textual note, Craigie astutely observes that this repetition of **בּוּשׁ** is “typical of the repetitive style of the psalm, forming an inner chiasmic structure within the verse” and furthermore, contributes “to the chiasmic structure of the psalm as a whole; v 3 has both **קוּיךָ** [root, **קוה**] and **יבּוּשׁוּ** [*sic*, root is **בּוּשׁ**], and the same verbs are used in reverse sequence in vv 20-21.”<sup>21</sup> N. Ridderbos captures the *inclusio* function of this style when he says, “the end of this psalm falls back on the beginning” (“der Schluss dieses Psalms auf den Anfang zurückgreift”).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 299: “If the developers of the biblical acrostic derived the idea from an outside source, the present evidence seems to indicate that Egypt was the most likely source.”

<sup>19</sup> *BDB*, 101.

<sup>20</sup> *BHS*, 1106.

<sup>21</sup> Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 216. Contra. Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 318. Thus the root **בּוּשׁ** appears three times in Ps 25 (vv. 2, 3, 20). On the chiasmic structure of 25:3, see also Watson, *Traditional Techniques*. Watson says the chiasmic structure is here used to express (or emphasize) ‘poetic justice’ and he cites other examples in Pss 7:16-17; 9:16 and 18:21, 25 (372). On the significance of the number 3 as connoting “completeness,” see Pope, “Number, Numbering, Numbers,” 3:564.

<sup>22</sup> N. H. Ridderbos, *Die Psalmen: Stilistische Verfahren und Aufbau mit besonderer Berücksichtigung von Ps 1-41* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1972), 36. See also p. 61. A similar observation noted by Pierre Auffret, *La Sagesse a Bati sa Maison: Etudes de Structures Littéraires dans L’Ancien Testament et Spécialement dans les Psaumes* (OBO 49; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 1982), 211-12.

What Craigie does not point out, however, is the chiasmic structure found on the morphological or grammatical level. A close look at the grammatical categories reveals that the following pattern occurs in v. 3: Participle [קוֹדֵד] + V [יבְּשׁוּ] // V [יבְּשׁוּ] + Participle [הבּוֹגְדִים]. Roman Jakobson long ago emphasized the important role of grammar in the construction of poems. He observes:

The poetic resources concealed in the morphological and syntactic structure of language—briefly, the poetry of grammar and its literary product, the grammar of poetry—have been seldom known to critics and mostly disregarded by linguists but skillfully mastered by creative writers.<sup>23</sup>

It should further be noted that the repetition of this term in v. 3, juxtaposed to its first occurrence, serves to emphasize the theme of divine reversal.<sup>24</sup> This motif occurs earlier in Pss 7:16-17; 9:16-17; 10:2; 12:4-5; 23:5a; 31:18; 35:4, 7-8, 26-27; 37:9, 14-15, 22 and 40:15. This theme of divine reversal is an example of satire that is repeatedly found in the prophetic literature. There is also another interesting theological connotation attached to בּוֹשׁ—the importance of “shame” in the Hebrew Bible and particularly in the prophetic corpus.<sup>25</sup> C. Westermann highlights the importance of the concept of “shame” (בּוֹשׁ) specifically in the lament psalms:

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<sup>23</sup> R. Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics,” in *Language in Literature*, 90. See also: “Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry,” in *Language in Literature*, 121-22, 128, 132-33 and “Grammatical Parallelism and Its Russian Facet,” in *Language in Literature*, 175.

<sup>24</sup> Briefly noted in closing comments on Ps 25, but not elaborated on in Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*: “Psalm 25 is pervaded by a spirit of reversal” (323). See Thomas Jemielity, *Satire and the Hebrew Prophets* (LCBI; Louisville, Kent.: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 25: “The Hebrew Scriptures are replete with stories of reversal, the stuff of irony: Yahweh achieves his ends, despite human proposing, interposing and disposing.”

<sup>25</sup> Jemielity, *Satire*, 25-39.

The laments almost always dwelt on the shame which the isolation of grief brought with it. Suffering was consistently viewed in its social aspects. Everyone forsook the sufferer; they fled from him as from a leper; they pointed their fingers at him and said that God had forsaken him. This was the depth of suffering and the real sharpness of the trial.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, T. Jemielity provides an observation that reminds us that artistic word-craft (here in the form of ironic reversal) and didacticism are *not mutually exclusive*: He writes:

The entertainment value of the Hebrew Scriptures for its audience should not be dismissed: they may please as well as teach, and in delighting, show a concern, however unconscious, with the pedagogical insinuation achieved by the craft which is art.<sup>27</sup>

Another key term in Ps 25, one that occurs six times in five verses (vv. 4, 5, 8, 9, 12), is the root  $\text{ךךך}$ , “to tread or march” or “to cause to tread” (along a certain way or path), “way, path” (noun form).<sup>28</sup> If one reads Ps 25 canonically, these six references to the way of Yahweh and to his leading the psalmist in the way one should go echoes Ps 1:6 in which the two “ways” play an important role in Psalm 1—the psalm that

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<sup>26</sup> Claus Westermann, *The Praise of God in the Psalms* (2d ed.; trans. Keith R. Crim, Richmond: John Knox, 1965), 119.

<sup>27</sup> Jemielity, *Satire*, 25.

<sup>28</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *BDB*, 201-2. The repetition of the same word, in this case the root  $\text{ךךך}$ , as the initial word in consecutive lines (vv. 4-5) is a rhetorical device known as *anaphora*. See T. F. V. Brogan, “Anaphora,” in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (ed. Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan; Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 73. Watson points out that although Ugaritic poetry does not exhibit alphabetic acrostics, it does, however, exhibit several instances of *anaphora* (*Traditional Techniques*, 431). Another example of this device is found in 25:18-19 with the root  $\text{ךךך}$ . Auffret, *La Sagesse*, 213-14, notes how the repetition of the roots  $\text{ךךך}$  and  $\text{למך}$  in vv. 4-5 contributes to the symmetry of the entire section (vv. 4-7).

introduces the entire collection.<sup>29</sup> Another interesting echo of Ps 1 (v. 3) in Ps 25 is found in 25:8, 12 – the root ירה (“to teach, instruction”) from which of course comes the Ps 1:3 term תורה (“instruction”).

Although it is true that Pss 25 and 34 are parallel in structure, there is also a clear thematic link between Pss 25 and 37 in the use of the root דרך. This root appears five times in Ps 37 (vv. 5, 7, 14,<sup>30</sup> 23, 34).

### *Various Sound Plays*

In Ps 25:1-5, there is a marked preponderance of the vowel /i/. The words involved are: קוֹיִתִּי, יִשְׁעִי, וּלְמַדְנִי, הַדְרִיכֵנִי (v. 1); לִי, בְּטַחְתִּי (v. 2); לְמַדְנִי, הוֹדִיעֵנִי (v. 4); וּלְמַדְנִי, הַדְרִיכֵנִי (v. 5). Jakobson provides an interesting summarizing discussion of the universal association of the vowel /i/—both in its attenuated sound as in “bit” and its longer sound as in “ping”—with smallness, insignificance or weakness.<sup>31</sup> In opening his song with the

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<sup>29</sup> J. Clinton McCann, Jr. *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: The Psalms as Torah* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 18, 25-27, 40. Note also that the terms דרך and אבד are again paired in Ps 2:12 in connection with the demise of the opponents of Yahweh’s anointed one. Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, notes in passing: “The words and conceptions of the Torah psalms suggest themselves [in Ps 25]” (320), but does not further develop this line of thought.

<sup>30</sup> In v. 14 the verbal root דרך appears in the secondary meaning of “to (tread) bend (a bow)” (Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *BDB*, 201; cf. Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT* 1:231). That is, one steps on the bow to bend it and string the bow. It is important to note, however, that the *visual* effect, like the visual effect of seeing the acrostic pattern in Ps 37, involves seeing this root several times (namely, five).

<sup>31</sup> R. Jakobson, “The Spell of Speech Sounds,” in *The Sound Shape of Language* (3d ed.; ed. Linda R. Waugh; Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2002), 184, 186-88, 190-91, 193, 195-96.

preponderance of first person (common) singular suffixes, the pious poet intuitively<sup>32</sup> begins this contrite psalm with an emphasis upon his weakness, insignificance, and dependence upon Yahweh.

Also found in vv. 4-5 is an interesting alternating pattern of sounds involving the final syllables of eight individual terms. Specifically, there are two repeated final sounds—*ka* and *iy*. The terms involved are as follows: אֲרַחֲתִיךָ, הוֹדִיעֲנִי, דָּרַכְתִּי, לְמַדְנִי, לְמַדְנִי, בְּאִמְתֶּךָ, הִדְרִיכֵנִי, and כִּי־אֲתָהּ. Involved in these lines is, of course, the repetition of a couple of Hebrew roots—the root דָּרַךְ, occurring twice and the root לָמַד, also occurring twice. While this repetition could be regarded as redundant and as another sign of the “wooden, unimaginative” style of the poet, it might also be regarded in a more positive light. There is an interesting alternating pattern here involving a couple of wordplays on sound.<sup>33</sup> The alternating sounds constitute what Jakobson would refer to as a “mirroring” effect. If we let the final “*ah*” sound be represented by *a* and the final “*iy*” sound represented by *b* then we see this mirroring pattern involving these eight terms: *ab/ab; ba/ba*.

On a linguistic level, the previous discussion of the association of the vowel /i/ with the concepts of smallness and weakness must be remembered here with *iy* and *ka*, especially since there is some evidence that the vowel /a/ is universally associated with

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<sup>32</sup> R. Jakobson, “Subliminal Verbal Patterning in Poetry,” in *Language in Literature*, 250-51, 261.

<sup>33</sup> On sound wordplays, see Andrew Welsh, “Pun,” in *New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 1005-6.

strength, largeness when compared with the vowel /i/.<sup>34</sup> And so, here in vv. 4-5 the poet begins the bi-colon with the final *ah* sound, associated with strength and addressing YHWH followed by the final *iy* sound on the next term referring to himself—emphasizing his weakness or dependence upon YHWH. This pattern is repeated in the next bi-colon in v. 4. Then the pattern is mirrored by the ending sounds of the four terms in v. 5.

In a 1991 article on the poetics of Ps 25, B. Doyle has called attention to the repetition and the parallelism of the keywords “way”/“path” and “make known”/“teach.”<sup>35</sup> He does not, however, highlight the wordplays on sound. Additionally, as noted by Doyle, there is a pattern of parallelism of word meanings. These patterns can perhaps be better appreciated when they are visually represented in the following table.

TABLE 5  
PARALLEL WORD MEANINGS IN VV. 4-5

Verses	Declarative/Instructional Terms	“Ways” / “Paths” Terms
v. 4a	הוֹד יַעֲנֵי	דַּרְכֵיךָ
v. 4b	לְמַדְנִי	אֲרַחֲזֶיךָ
v. 5a	הִדְרִיכֵנִי	
v. 5b	וּלְמַדְנִי	בְּאִמְתְּךָ

As can be seen in this table, seven of the eight terms involved in the mirroring of final sounds discussed earlier also involve parallelism semantically. Note the synonymy

<sup>34</sup> R. Jakobson, “Spell of Speech Sounds,” in *Sound Shape*, 188.

<sup>35</sup> Brian Doyle, “Just You, and I, waiting—The Poetry of Psalm 25,” *OTE* (new series): 14 (2001): 203.

of the words in the middle column: “to make known, declare,” “to teach, train someone,” “to lead (here, metaphorically),” “to teach, train.” Then note the synonymy of the terms in the far right hand column of the table: “(your) ways,” “(your) paths,” “(your) truth.”

It is also noteworthy that the first final *iy* syllable (v. 4) is “framed” by the two final *ka* syllables in v. 4 and the first final *ka* syllable in v. 5a is “framed” by the two final *iy* syllables in v. 5a. E. Gerstenberger’s comment on the acrostic pattern is appropriate here. He says that alphabetic poetry “tries to please the eye of the reader *or the ear of sophisticated intellectuals*”<sup>36</sup> [italics added]. This observation supports Gerstenberger’s contention that “wisdom psalms [including the acrostics, of course] . . . were not composed and used strictly in a private or educational setting that was foreign to the cult . . . all these so-called wisdom psalms in reality were liturgical pieces from the very beginning. Their changed appearance and their different message are due solely to the changed conditions of worship during and after the Exile.”<sup>37</sup>

Back to the previous quotation from Gerstenberger, his emphasis here is not just upon the “eye” of the reader but also upon the ear of the auditor. This observation is

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<sup>36</sup> Erhard Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 1* (FOTL XIV; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988), 20. In contrast to this last phrase from Gerstenberger, W. Watson restricts acrostic poems to the eye: “If we take the two extremes of Ugarit (as early) and Qumran (as late), it is quite obvious that while the Ras Shamra texts yield no alphabetic acrostics, this form was quite a favorite at Qumran . . . This provides corroborative evidence for the ‘oral poetry as early’ theory since acrostics can only be appreciated in written form” (*Traditional Techniques*, 89). Ruppert also says that the acrostic pattern appealed not to the ear but to the keen eye of the reader: “Ps 25 aber die weder für den Vortragenden noch für das Ohr der Zuhörer, sondern allein für das scharfe *Auge des Lesers* geschaffen sein kann” (But in Ps 25, it is possible that this [acrostic pattern] was created neither for the recitation nor for the ear of the listeners but only for the sharp eye of the reader) (“Psalm 25,” 578) [my translation].

<sup>37</sup> Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 1*, 20.

important, for the repetition of final sounds as seen in Table 5 is characteristic of Hebrew poetry—both inside and outside of the Psalter. T. McCreesh has meticulously documented similar sound patterning in his work on Proverbs 10-29. The principal *function* of such sound patterns is basically to provide cohesion within the various bi-cola and to “underscore key words.”<sup>38</sup> Such sound patterning, McCreesh observes, “knits the cola even more closely together and calls attention to the meaning [of the key words].”<sup>39</sup> This observation also seems apropos for the various sound patterns discovered here in Ps 25. Linguistically, the alternating contrast between the vowels /i/ (small, weak) and /a/ (large, strong) highlights the dependence of the weak psalmist upon the strong Yahweh (the “I” upon the “thou”).

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<sup>38</sup> Thomas P. McCreesh. *Biblical Sound and Sense: Poetic Sound Patterns in Proverbs 10-29* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 46, 51, 52-54, 75, 77, 105, 138. On pp. 17-22 McCreesh argues convincingly for the existence of “conscious sound patterning in biblical Hebrew poetry.” He points to the occurrence of sound patterning in other languages with affixing structures (case endings, nominal and verbal prefixes and suffixes, etc). His study highlights “numerous examples of sound patterns in the Hebrew proverbs” (17). He admits that the authorial intent of the Hebrew poet(s) cannot be determined *but* correctly points out that this does not have to be determined or proven. Rather, he says: “pleasing sounds in speech can come very naturally. . .A literary critic has said that such vowel and consonant patterns ‘are seldom consciously worked out by the poet. . .The pattern seems to occur to the poet as a melody may to a composer’ . . .Thus, if alliteration is in a text, it is there and can be studied as such, whether consciously arrived at or not” (22). Cf. Daniel Grossberg, *Centripetal and Centrifugal Structures in Biblical Poetry* (SBLMS 39; Atlanta: Scholars, 1989), 1-2, and 10.

<sup>39</sup> McCreesh, *Biblical Sound*, 53. Again, “[linking sound patterns] provide the artist with more variety, since he can choose different sequences of sound to give a line *euphonic unity*” [italics added] (52). This unity produced by sound patterns is in addition to the semantic unity observed by Alter, *Biblical Poetry*, 114: “. . .many psalms, on scrutiny, prove to have a finely tensile semantic weave that one would not expect from the seeming conventionality of the language.”

Yet another interesting pattern is found in an examination of the parallel meanings involved in these seven terms/five roots. First, consider the three terms ending in *ka*: דרכך, ארחותך, and באמתך. Obviously, the first two terms have very similar meanings: “your ways,”<sup>40</sup> and “your paths.”<sup>41</sup> There is also, however, some shared meaning between these two synonymous terms and the third *ka*-ending term אמת. This fact becomes apparent when one looks at the usage of אמת within Ps 25 itself and within two other psalms. In Ps 25:10, one reads: “all the *paths* (root, ארח) of YHWH are steadfast love and truth.” In this text, there is a very close connection between the roots ארח and אמת. The latter is in fact the predicate of the former, specifying “to what class or category” the main noun (subject), in this case, ארח “can be assigned.”<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, in two other psalms these two roots are closely related (Pss 26:3 and 86:11). Therefore, looking again at the material presented in Table 5 the parallelism of the terms in the right-hand column is more than just morphological—it is also semantic.

Similarly, the *iy*-ending terms in Ps 25:4-5a also evidence a semantic parallelism in addition to the visually-obvious morphological parallelism. First, the root ידע in the

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<sup>40</sup> דרך, see Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT*, 1:232, on “road,” “way,” used metaphorically to describe one’s “way” (of life) and, of course, God’s behavior, or “way.”

<sup>41</sup> ארח, see Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT* 1:87: “way,” then “behavior.”

<sup>42</sup> See Paul Joüon, S.J., *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (2 vols.; trans. and rev. T. Muraoka; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1996), 2:566-67 (154ea).

hiphil means “to make known, to teach,”<sup>43</sup> in effect making this term basically synonymous with the other two roots that end in *-iy* and also connote “teaching, instruction, guidance/leading.”<sup>44</sup> Might not the repetition represented visually in Table 5 be better regarded as an example of poetic skill and artistic wordplay instead of an example of redundancy? Again, the insights of R. Alter concerning the literary nature of the biblical text are appropriate here:

. . . In many cases a literary student of the Bible has more to learn from the traditional commentaries than from modern scholarship. The difference between the two is ultimately the difference between assuming that the text is an intricately interconnected unity, as the midrashic exegetes did, and assuming it is a patchwork of frequently disparate documents, as most modern scholars have supposed. With their assumption of interconnectedness, the makers of the Midrash were often as exquisitely attuned to small verbal signals of continuity and to significant lexical nuances as any “close reader” of our own age.<sup>45</sup>

#### *Additional Artistic Components*

In vv. 6-7 there is a “sandwich” type construction involving three occurrences of the root זכר (“to remember”). This root also happens to be the initial word in the † line of this acrostic poem. First the psalmist asks Yahweh to remember something—“*your mercies and your covenant loyalty* [חסד]” (v. 6a). He then asks Yahweh to *not* remember “*the sins*<sup>46</sup> *of my youth and my transgressions*” (v.7), followed by a third and final request

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<sup>43</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *BDB*, 395.

<sup>44</sup> Piel of למד (see *BDB*, 540); hiphil of דרר (*BDB*, 202).

<sup>45</sup> R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981), 11.

<sup>46</sup> Note that חטאות begins v. 7, which is the † line in the acrostic.

that Yahweh “remember me” (v. 7b). W. G. E. Watson, followed by B. Doyle, notes the wordplay in v. 7 involving “remember” / “do not remember” but does not note the three-fold repetition of זכר in vv. 6-7 and the resultant sandwich or envelope construction.<sup>47</sup>

This “sandwich” construction is further underscored by the two occurrences of the name יהוה in both vv. 6a and 7b, in the same line as the two imperative calls to “remember” and the name’s absence in v. 7a where the plea is made: “do not remember.” This additional “sandwich” or envelope construction is destroyed if one follows *BHS* and omits the occurrence of יהוה in v. 7a.<sup>48</sup>

The effect of this literary device is to, of course, emphasize the importance of being “remembered” by Yahweh (in contrast to the fate of the enemy in Ps 9:7) and also to parallel the psalmist (“me,” v. 7b) with Yahweh’s “mercies” and “covenant loyalty” (v. 6a). And in a way not seen before, in the world of this psalm the poet needs Yahweh to “remember mercy” when he “remembers” the psalmist for the psalmist is guilty of sins and transgressions (vv. 7, 11, 18). Just as the poet mentioned his sins and guilt three times, so also the request for Yahweh to remember (or not) is made three times. This mirroring is another way (internal to the poem rather than external, like the acrostic pattern) for the poet to signify completeness.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques*, 249 and Doyle, “Just you, and I,” *OTE* (new series) 14 (2001): 209 respectively.

<sup>48</sup> *BHS*, 1107. The *BHS* editors do, however, cite impressive textual attestation for the omission of the name in v. 7a: Cairo Geniza mss; Septuagint (Vaticanus) and codex Parisinus Latinus.

<sup>49</sup> Pope, “Number, Numbering, Numbers,” 3:564. Note that there is also a three-fold repetition of the root חסד (vv. 6, 7, 10). This latter root is surprisingly absent in the other acrostic psalms of Book I.

In 25:12 the reader encounters a stylistic device that is usually associated with Hebrew verse, specifically with narrative. This device is the rhetorical question that appears in the first half of this verse: *מִי־זֶה הָאִישׁ יִרָא יְהוָה*, (“Who is the man who fears YHWH?”). In his chapter on narrative style, S. Bar-Efrat succinctly defines *rhetorical question* and also comments on its stylistic function:

A question which is not asked for the sake of achieving an answer, since the answer is well known to the speaker. The purpose of the question is to persuade the audience by implying that the answer is self-evident or known to everybody and therefore not to be doubted or discussed.<sup>50</sup>

It is important to note that the information or statements *following* a rhetorical question do not answer the question posed as is the case with a non-rhetorical interrogative sentence—as in the question, for example, in Ps 4:3 or the question in Ps 15:1; both questions that seek (and sometimes receive) an answer. Here in connection with 25:12a, it is instructive to note that the material following in vv. 12b-14 is not answering the question “who is the man that fears Yahweh?” but rather telling the reader about the good fortune of that man who fears Yahweh. The answer to the question in v. 12a is found *before* the rhetorical question is asked. Who is the man who fears Yahweh? His identity is found in vv. 1-11. He is the psalmist himself—the one who “lifts up” his

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<sup>50</sup> Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (JSOTSup 17; trans. Dorothea Shefer-Vanson, 1989), 211. In the same paragraph, Bar-Efrat points out that “the use of rhetorical questions is very frequent in biblical prose.” While perhaps not as common in the poetry of the Psalter, rhetorical questions do serve an important stylistic role in many of the psalms of Book I (Pss 6:6; 8:5; 10:13; 14:4; 18:32; 27:1; 30:10; 35:10). Moshe Held wrote an important early article on rhetorical questions in Ugaritic and in Hebrew in which he notes the literary device in both literatures. See his “Rhetorical Questions in Ugaritic and in Biblical Hebrew,” *Eretz-Israel* 9 (1969): 71-79. His aim, however, is to use the Ugaritic rhetorical questions to “restore” or reconstruct similar questions in the Masoretic texts. He has nothing to say about the function of the literary device. In his examples, the Ugaritic text is also reconstructed before he moves on to the Hebrew text. This fact explains why over one half of the article consists of footnotes.

soul to Yahweh (v. 1), who asks Yahweh to teach him (v. 4), who prays to Yahweh that he might remember the psalmist in steadfast love (v.7), and who asks Yahweh to “forgive my iniquity” (v. 11). What more vivid picture of one who “fears Yahweh” could be presented?

This type of rhetorical question is not totally dissimilar to the type of rhetorical question that expects (or sometimes, demands) the answer: “No,” or “nothing,” or “no one.” An example of this common type of rhetorical question is found in Pss 6:6; 14:4; 18:32; 27:1; 30:10; and 35:10. Both of these types of rhetorical questions are commonly found in Hebrew narrative. Also, in both of these rhetorical questions the answers are different, and yet the answers are “self-evident . . . known to everybody”<sup>51</sup> who has read (or heard) the psalm from the beginning. But what is the *function* of this rhetorical question in Ps 25:12? Bar-Efrat’s explanation that “the purpose of the question is to persuade the audience by implying that the answer is self-evident or known to everybody and therefore not to be doubted” is a start.

In addition, however, it should be noted that this rhetorical question appears *near* the middle of the poem (in fact, הַיָּהוָה begins the ה-line of the acrostic poem). It should be recalled that this poem, like Ps 34, has an extra ה-line tacked on at the end, after the ה-line.<sup>52</sup> The rhetorical question in 25:12, in the middle of the poem, serves therefore to

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<sup>51</sup> S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative*, 211. M. Held points out that rhetorical questions (specifically, the double rhetorical question) appear in Hebrew verse as well as in prose. Interestingly, however, he does not cite any texts from the Psalter in his many examples of rhetorical questions in poetic texts (M. Held, “Rhetorical Questions,” 72).

<sup>52</sup> See again Skehan, “Structure of the Song of Moses,” 160, n. 13 and Ceresko, “ABCs of Wisdom,” 100.

sum up the righteousness of the Yahweh-fearing psalmist. That is, v. 12's question "who is the man who fears Yahweh?" causes the reader to pause and to recall the virtues of the psalmist (and those who read/hear and identify with him) listed in vv. 1-11 *before* plunging ahead into the second half of the psalm in which the psalmist describes the blessings that accrue to the person who fears Yahweh. Thus the first part of the psalm, vv. 1-11, describes the character of the righteous person and the second part of the psalm, vv. 12bff (specifically, vv. 12b-15) describes the blessings enjoyed by the righteous person at the hand of Yahweh. It is interesting to note how *specific* statements in this latter section answer certain of the requests earlier in the poem. For example, v. 12 exclaims that Yahweh will teach "the way" (דֶּרֶךְ) to the one who fears Yahweh. This blessing mirrors the request in v. 4 that asks Yahweh to "teach me your ways" (דֶּרֶךְ).<sup>53</sup>

Again in v. 8, the psalmist had said that Yahweh "instructs (יָרָה) sinners in the way (דֶּרֶךְ)." Verse 7 had earlier made it clear that the psalmist is one of these "sinners." See also v. 11. Then, in v. 12, the psalmist says that Yahweh will "instruct" (יָרָה) the man who fears Yahweh in the "way" (דֶּרֶךְ) that he should choose. Finally, the idea of "making known" and "his [Yahweh's] covenant" (hiphil of יָדַע and then the term

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<sup>53</sup> The force of this connection is somewhat mitigated in the NRSV and its choice of gender-inclusive language. In these verses cited, v. 12 reads (in the RSV): "Who is the man that fears the LORD? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose." This verse clearly echoes v. 4 in which the psalmist makes the request to know Yahweh's ways and to be taught his paths. In other words, "the man" (singular) in v. 12b is the psalmist, the person who has been asking throughout to be instructed by Yahweh. The NRSV rendering of v. 12b ("Who are they [plural] that fear the LORD? He will teach them [plural] the way that they [plural] should choose") ever so slightly obscures the internal balance and the internal unity of the poem. See similar comments on comparing the RSV and the NRSV by Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Preaching from the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 4.

בריתו, respectively) in vv. 4 and 10 are mirrored in v. 14, in the description of blessing accruing to “those who fear (Yahweh).”

Another literary/theological link between Pss 25 and 37 is the thrice-used root קוה, “to hope, to wait for eagerly”<sup>54</sup> found in 25:3, 5, 21 and then found twice in Ps 37 (vv. 9, 34). The critics of the acrostic psalms may choose to describe this repetition as characteristic of their supposed wooden and unimaginative vocabulary. It may be the case, however, that this present example of a three-fold appearance of the same root is in fact a purposeful repetition—one made for rhetorical effect. Rather than assuming that the poet re-uses this term because his vocabulary is deficient (due to his “slavish” commitment to the acrostic pattern), one could just as easily assume that this three-fold repetition is yet another example of the number three as a signifier of completeness.<sup>55</sup>

One discovers a unique theological development in Ps 25:10, 14. The theologically important term “covenant” (ברית) occurs once in both of these verses. What is unique is the fact that this use is the only appearance of this term in Book I of the Psalter.

Furthermore, the two-fold occurrence of ברית in Ps 25:10, 14 constitutes the only

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<sup>54</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *BDB*, 875 and Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT* 3:1082. Compare the related term, תקוה in Ps 9:19 (Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT* 4:1782). See also C. Westermann, “קוה,” in *TLOT* (ed. E. Jenni and C. Westermann), 3:1129-31. Westermann says in conclusion: “Properly, Hebrew requires an object of hope. . .thus one could speak of an eloquent brevity: God is the one, then, whose being is help and deliverance. Without exception, however, hope in God is discussed positively. This use reflects Israel’s history with its God, a history in which this God has become hope for his people” (1132).

<sup>55</sup> Pope, “Number, Numbering, Numbers,” 3:564. He also gives several examples, mostly from narrative texts, but also some from poetic texts, of the Hebrew Bible’s proclivity for the number “3.”

occurrence of this term in any of the acrostic psalms with the exception of Ps 111:5, 9.<sup>56</sup> It is interesting to note that this important term occurs only these four times in the eight psalmic acrostic poems (Pss 25:10, 14; 111:5,9). Notice the first two occurrences appear in a Book I acrostic and the last two occurrences appear in a Book V acrostic. This observation is one more piece of evidence to support the claim that the eight acrostic poems in Books I and V (respectively) function as literary “bookends,” contributing to the overall symmetry of the entire collection as we have it before us.<sup>57</sup>

There is one more subtle literary connection between Pss 25 and 111. This connection is the term **גִּיד** (“council,” or “circle of familiar or intimate friends”).<sup>58</sup> Once again, this term occurs only here among the four acrostics of Book I and only in 111:1 among the acrostics of Book V.

On a macro level, P. Auffret offers an interesting observation about vv. 1-7, 15-21 and vv. 8-14 in the structure of Ps 25. He notes that the psalmist personally is predominant in the opening section and in the closing section. In the center of the poem, framed as it were by the personal “witness” of the psalmist, is a more general section on

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<sup>56</sup> This important term occurs twenty-one times in the Psalter. There is at least one occurrence in each of the five books (Pss 25:10, 14; 44:18; 50:5, 16; 55:21; 74:20; 78:10, 37; 83:6; 89:4, 29, 35, 40; 103:18; 105:8, 10; 106:45; 111:5, 9; 132:12). Note that over half of these (twelve occurrences) appear in Book III. According to Gerald H. Wilson, the Davidic covenant is a crucial theological theme in Book III. See, Wilson, “The Shape of the Book of Psalms,” *Int* 46/2 (1992): 134.

<sup>57</sup> Freedman, *Psalm 119: The Exaltation of Torah*, 2.

<sup>58</sup> See Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *BDB*, 691. This term is rare in the Psalter. See Pss 55:15; 64:3; 83:4 and 89:8 for the only other occurrences other than the two in Pss 25:13 and 111:1 respectively.

the personal character of Yahweh (vv. 8-14). Auffret's main point is that the two personal sections on either side of the statements about Yahweh's character and goodness serve to underscore or "authenticate" the statements about Yahweh.<sup>59</sup> It is interesting to note that in Psalm 34 there is also a middle section of general praise of Yahweh's goodness and character following an opening seven verses of personal "witness" to Yahweh's care (see Ps 34:1-7 and 8-11). Psalms 25 and 34 are, of course, also structurally similar.<sup>60</sup>

If the four acrostics in Book I and the four acrostics in Book V may be regarded as a form of *inclusion*—a set of literary/artistic type of "bookends," so to speak, then perhaps the four-fold occurrence of this term in these two acrostics should also be regarded similarly. That is, this phenomenon is yet another way in which the final editor(s) of the Psalter sought to witness to the unity of the collection and to the completeness of the the Psalter's witness<sup>61</sup> to the faith (and in this case, *covenant*) of Yahweh (i.e., from Book I to Book V; from *Aleph* to *Tav*).

On a macro level in the context of the Book I acrostics, it is important to note the important repetition of the root ארץ ("land") throughout all four of the acrostic poems in Book I and the resultant alternating, four-part pattern produced by the repetition. Such a

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<sup>59</sup> Auffret, *La Sagesse*, 227: "Ces deux pôles servent à exprimer l'authenticité, la vérité, de l'oeuvre divine: elle est effective et en elle se manifeste l'être de Yahvé" ("These two poles serve to express the authenticity, the truth, of the divine work: it is real and in it the being of Yahweh is manifest") [my translation].

<sup>60</sup> Freedman, *Psalm 119: The Exaltation of Torah*, 2.

<sup>61</sup> Bellinger, *Psalms: Reading and Studying the Book of Praises* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1990), 2, 4, 135-45; Jemielity, *Satire*, 27.

pattern has the effect of tying together not only the poems that are structurally parallel (Pss 9/10 with 37 and 25 with 34) but in fact ties together all four poems. The first occurrence of ארץ in the acrostics, as previously observed, is in Ps 10:16. Here, the psalmist exclaims: “the nations shall be destroyed *from* [YHWH’s] *land*.” Then in Ps 25:13, one reads: “and his [i.e., the one who fears YHWH, v. 12] seed shall inherit (the) *land*.” The concept of separation from the land appears again in the next occurrence of ארץ which happens to be Ps 34:17: “the face of YHWH is against evildoers to cut off their remembrance *from* (the) *land*.” And then, finally, in Ps 37 one reads the statement (several times) that the righteous servants of Yahweh, those who are blessed by him because they follow his way, “will inherit the land” (vv. 9, 11, 22, 29, 34). This four-part, alternating pattern can be best appreciated when seen in the following table.

TABLE 6  
AN ALTERNATING PATTERN ACROSS THE BOOK I ACROSTICS

Alternating Phrases	Verses
A: “shall be destroyed from his land,”	Ps 10:16
B: “shall inherit the land,”	Ps 25:13
A’: “cut off...from the land,”	Ps 34:17
B’: “shall inherit the land,”	Ps 37:9, 11, 22, 29, 34

Yet another play on words occurs in Ps 25: 20-21. This example of paronomasia involves the roots נצל (v. 20) and נצר (v. 21), which are in the same semantic field,

meaning basically, “to deliver, to preserve”<sup>62</sup> and “to guard, keep, to preserve”<sup>63</sup> respectively. Then, of course, these two roots can be used in a play on their respective sounds. Furthermore, the forms of these two roots in their respective verses appear in the same position in their respective clauses. Both terms occur after the initial four syllables in vv. 20 and 21. Compare the initial Hebrew syllables of v. 20: *sham/rah/naph/shi* (followed by the root נצל) with the initial Hebrew syllables of v. 21: *tom/wa/yo/sher* (followed by the root נצר). Thus in both cases these two semantically-related terms occur in the fifth position (phonemically) of their respective verses.

The effect of this two-fold play on words is to parallel “perfection” and “uprightness” (vs. 21) with Yahweh, who is the unstated subject of the verb root נצל in v. 20. In other words, the understood subject of the verb translated “deliver/preserve me” in v. 20 is Yahweh (see v. 15). Then, in v. 21 the compound subject of the verb translated “let . . . preserve me” (נצר) is “perfection/integrity” and “uprightness.” Thus Yahweh is subtly identified with or paralleled with uprightness. This statement at the end of the poem echoes v. 8 where Yahweh is described as “upright” (ישר). This parallelism of “YHWH” and “integrity” / “right” is noted by B. Doyle but he describes this parallel

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<sup>62</sup> Milton C. Fisher, “נצל,” *TWOT* (ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce K. Waltke), 2:594. See also U. Bergmann, “נצל,” in *TLOT*, 2:760-62.

<sup>63</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, “נצר,” *TWOT*, 2:594-95. See this connotation of “preserve” also in: Pss 12:8; 31:24; 32:7; 40:12; 61:8; 64:2; and 140:2, 5.

as a chiasmic formation that does not seem to be an accurate description of the structure.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, these statements vv. 20-21 also serve in a small, and yet significant way, to tie the poem together into a unified whole.

### *Connections to Psalm 24 and Psalm 26*

One area that has not been explored fully is the possibility of connections between Ps 25 and the psalm that precedes it canonically—Ps 24. Often in the Psalter there are apparent connections linguistically/semantically and/or theologically between contiguous psalms. This approach is again based on the conviction that the Psalter is best read as a unity, as in its “final form”—read as a book “from the beginning.”<sup>65</sup> So, are there any connections between Pss 24 and 25? There are apparently a couple of connections.

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<sup>64</sup> Doyle, “Just you, and I,” *OTE* (new series): 14 (2001): 205, where Doyle calls the following structure “chiasmic”: “a: integrity and right / b: protect me // b’: I waited / a’: YHWH.” Later, Doyle also concludes that it is “possible to establish a degree of priority or a hierarchy of focus between the major poetical techniques employed by the author of Psalm 25” and that, in fact, the concentric pattern (rather than the acrostic pattern) is the pattern that appears to have priority (209-10). Doyle says that the concentric pattern, noted by Craigie and others, is the “dominant poetic device employed by the poet” the device that supports “the author of Psalm 25’s primary intention” [drawing attention to v. 11’s unique confession of sin] (210). Although Doyle’s point is interesting, I am not convinced that we gain anything by hypothesizing as to the poet’s intention. Jakobson discusses the issue of a hierarchy of artistic devices “within the framework of a given poetic genre” (Jakobson, “The Dominant,” in *Language in Literature*, 44). This discussion should be read in the context of his challenge of the dichotomy between synchronic versus diachronic approaches to language as an oversimplification (Jakobson, “Problems in the Study of Language and Literature,” in *Language in Literature*, 46). Nevertheless, he does caution against making the number of occurrences the sole criterion for said hierarchy. In fact, he argues “a phoneme that appears only once, but in a key word, in a pertinent position, against a contrastive background, may acquire striking significance” (Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics,” in *Language in Literature*, 88).

<sup>65</sup> DeClaisse-Walford, *Reading*.

First, consider the occurrence of the phrase “to lift up his<sup>66</sup>/my soul” in both Ps 24:4 and Ps 25:1. As the poet in Ps 24 details the virtues of the person who may “ascend the hill of Yahweh and stand in his holy place” (v. 3), he says that such a person does not “lift up his soul” (לֹא־נִשְׂא . . . נַפְשׁוֹ) to falsehood.” The term נִשְׂא appears three more times in this psalm, but never again in connection with the term נַפְשׁ (see vv. 5, 7 and 9). The next time this phrase occurs in the Psalter is in Ps 25:1. Here, the psalmist says he “lifts up his soul” *not* to falsehood but to Yahweh. Thus the psalmist is to be potentially identified with those who are allowed to stand in Yahweh’s holy place. He does not lift up his soul to falsehood, but rather, to Yahweh. The connection becomes more interesting when one realizes that the word “falsehood” (שׁוֹא) in 24:4 is sometimes used euphemistically to refer to idols, which are “empty” or “false” in the view of the biblical writers. Thus, the psalmist in 24:4 speaks of one who does not lift up his soul to an idol<sup>67</sup> and the writer of Ps 25 opens his poem by speaking of lifting up his soul to Yahweh. The suggestion that the psalmist is in the company of those who are allowed to stand in Yahweh’s holy place is further confirmed in Ps 25:4-5, 16-18, which make it quite clear that the poet of Psalm 25 is a person who “seeks” the “God of his salvation” (Ps 24:5-6).

Second, the phrase “God of (his/my) salvation” (מֵאֱלֹהֵי יְשׁוּעָו) occurs in Ps 24:5 and then again in Ps 25:5. While this appellation for the deity is, of course, found in other

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<sup>66</sup> On Ps 25:4, נַפְשׁוֹ appears in the *BHS* text, but their note suggests: “read with Cairo Geniza fragment, with multiple manuscripts and versions נַפְשׁוֹ.” This repetition of the idiom, “to lift up the soul” is noted but not explored in the comments on Ps 24 by J. Clinton McCann, Jr. *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: The Psalms as Torah* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1993), 74.

<sup>67</sup> See Pss 31:7; 119:37; Jer. 18:15. See also Dahood, *Psalms I*, 151.

psalms, it is not as common as one might initially suspect (see Pss 18:4, 7; 24:5; 27:9; 51:16; (. . . “our” salvation in 66:5; 68:20; 79:9; 85:5); 88:1; (cf. 62:8; 89:27; 140:8). This phrase, then, serves as another subtle semantic link between Pss 24 and 25 or, at least, between the sections Ps 24:3-6 and Ps 25:1-5. These two semantic links can be better appreciated by means of the following chart.

TABLE 7

## SEMANTIC LINKS BETWEEN PSS 24 AND 25

Ps 24 Phrases	Ps 25 Phrases
לא־נשא . . . נפשי מאלהי ישׁעו	נפשי אשא אלהי ישׁעי

Are there any thematic connections between these two sections of these two contiguous poems?<sup>68</sup> Perhaps so. Long ago, C. Keil and F. Delitzsch made the passing comment about the thematic connection between the two rhetorical questions asked in Pss 24 and 25 respectively. In their notes on Ps 25 they say: “A question similar to the question, *Who may ascend the mountain of Jahve?* Which Ps xxiv propounded, is thrown out by Ps xxv., *Who is he that feareth Jahve?* in order to answer it in great and glorious

<sup>68</sup> Compare Bellinger’s thematic/theological connection of Pss 100 and 101: “How a psalm fits into the context of the book is important in interpretation. Psalm 100 is a general hymn of praise, but it concludes a collection of psalms celebrating God’s kingship and precedes a royal psalm. Observations like these can enhance the task of interpretation” (*Psalms: Reading and Studying*, 30).

promises.”<sup>69</sup> In Ps 24:3-6 the Psalter describes the righteous person who is able to stand before Yahweh. This text provides, with words, a portrait of the person who does not “lift up his soul” (24:4) to falsehood, who seeks Yahweh, the “God of his salvation” (24:5-6). In Ps 25 which follows, the Psalter paints again with words a portrait of a pious person “lifting up his soul” (25:1) not to falsehood, but to Yahweh, the “God of his salvation” (25:5). Furthermore, though the term “seeks” is not repeated in Ps 25:1-5, this concept is certainly the theme of those verses. Especially verses 4-5 provide a portrait of what it looks like to “seek Yahweh” or to “seek his ways,” and thus complement 24:6.

On the other side of the canonical reading of Psalm 25, there is an apparent slight connection between the ending of Ps 25 and the beginning of Ps 26. In Ps 25:21 one finds the Hebrew term **אֱת**, “integrity, innocence,” and then again at the beginning of Ps 26, in verse 1. This connection between a psalm and its successive psalm by means of a catchword or catchphrase shared between the ending of the first psalm and the beginning of the next psalm occurs four other times in Book I of the Psalter: Pss 7:18b and 8:2a (**שׁוּ**); 8:10 and 9:3b (**שׁמַרְךָ**); 20:10b and 21:2a (**מַלְךְ**); 32:11a and 33:1a (**צַדִּיקִים**).

### *Summary*

This chapter has shone the bright light of analysis upon the wonderful and powerful beauty of Ps 25. This second of the Book I acrostic poems is not only a unified literary work, but is also deserving of the designation “literary art form”<sup>70</sup> regardless of its

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<sup>69</sup> C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (trans. James Martin; reprint ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982), 5/1:340.

<sup>70</sup> Ruppert, “Psalm 25,” 578.

classification as far as genre is concerned; or its reconstructed cultic setting.<sup>71</sup> The psalm uses various artistic devices or components to underscore and heighten the message of the poem but also to entertain the hearers and thus secure their participation in the world of the poem.

In the next chapter additional links between Ps 25 and its structurally parallel poem, Ps 34, will be explored in greater detail. There are no less than six specific linguistic and literary connections between these two Book I acrostic psalms. These connections range from a proclivity towards sensorial-type language to the repetition of identical word roots in the last halves of both poems.

#### *Translation*

1: Of David. **To you**,<sup>72</sup> O Yahweh, my soul I lift up.

2: O my God in you I trust, do not let me be ashamed; do not let my enemies rejoice<sup>73</sup> over<sup>74</sup> me.

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<sup>71</sup> For a brief, succinct critique of the reconstructive (“excavative”) goals of positivism and of form criticism, see Leo G. Perdue, *The Collapse of History: Reconstructing Old Testament Theology* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 11, 13, 19, 30, 32, 46 and 154. The shift from looking *behind* the text (history) to looking at the text itself (either as canonical scripture or as human literature) is discussed in Perdue’s chapter 6 (153ff).

<sup>72</sup> The boldface print is used to highlight the emphatic connotation of the Hebrew word order.

<sup>73</sup> Heb.: **עָלַי**. Infrequently used in the Hebrew Bible. Of the four occurrences in the Psalter (Pss 5:12; 9:3; 25:2; 68:4), this occurrence in Ps 25:2 is the only use of the term in a negative context.

<sup>74</sup> Preposition **עַל** here in this sense of “over” (literally, “to, concerning”). This usage is an example of the “dative of disadvantage” expressing to whose disadvantage the action of the verb occurs. See Joüon, S.J., *Grammar*, 2:488 (133d).

3: **Indeed, all who hope** in you shall never be ashamed; **they**<sup>75</sup> will be ashamed—the ones who commit treachery *without cause*.<sup>76</sup>

4: Make me know your ways, O Yahweh, teach me your paths.

5: Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my deliverance, in you I hope all the day long.

6: Remember your compassion, O Yahweh, and your steadfast love for they are from antiquity.

7: The sins of my youth and my transgressions, do not remember (them) in keeping with your steadfast love. Remember me for the sake of your goodness, O Yahweh.

8: Good and upright is Yahweh. Therefore he *instructs*<sup>77</sup> sinners in the way.

9: He leads the humble ones<sup>78</sup> in justice, he teaches the humble ones his way.

10: All the paths of Yahweh are steadfast love and truth to those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

11: For the sake of your name, O Yahweh, *pardon*<sup>79</sup> my guilt for it is great

<sup>75</sup> The boldface print is used here to highlight the force of the initial particle **אִם** and the emphatic use of the superfluous personal pronoun.

<sup>76</sup> Heb. **רִיקָם**. Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT*, 2:1229 suggests “without success” for this occurrence. The context, nevertheless, and the meaning “without cause” in Ps 7:5 (the only other occurrence of our term in the Psalter) suggests that this translation is best here. In Ps 7:5, if the psalmist has acted in an offensive way “without cause,” he deserves to be disciplined (Ps 7:6). Here in Ps 25 the psalmist’s enemies (v. 2) have dealt treacherously “without cause” and thus deserve to be ashamed (v. 3).

<sup>77</sup> Heb.: **יָרָה**. Also in v. 12. These two occurrences subtly identify the poet with “the sinners” who are “instructed” by Yahweh (see vv. 7a, 8b) and with “the man who fears Yahweh” and who is therefore able to be “instructed” in the proper way (v. 12).

<sup>78</sup> Heb.: **עֲנוּיִם**. Interestingly, this term occurs in all four of the alphabetic acrostics of Book I (Pss 9:19; 10:12, 17; 25:9; 34:3; 37:11).

<sup>79</sup> Heb.: **סָלַח**. Here the Qal (waw consecutive) Perfect is used with the force of an imperative. On the imperfect tense used in place of the imperative, see Joüon, S.J., *Grammar*, 2:372 (113m).

12: **Who**<sup>80</sup> is the man that fears Yahweh? He will instruct him in the way he should choose.

13: His soul will *spend the night in goodness*<sup>81</sup> and his descendents will inherit the land.

14: The fellowship of Yahweh is for those who fear him and his covenant is made known to them.

15: My eyes are continually towards Yahweh for he will snatch my feet out of the net.

16: Turn to me and be gracious to me for I am alone, and afflicted.

17: The distresses of my heart [please] soothe; snatch me out of my stresses.

18: See my affliction and my trouble and forgive all my sins.

19: See my enemies for they are many and with violent **hatred** they **hate** me.<sup>82</sup>

20: Guard my soul and rescue me. Do not let me be ashamed for I seek refuge in you.

21: Let integrity and uprightness watch over me for you are my hope.

22: Rescue Israel, O God, from all his distresses.

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<sup>80</sup> The boldface print is used to indicate the strengthening of the interrogative by the presence of ׀. On this use of the particle, see Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT*, 1:264.

<sup>81</sup> Thematically, though not semantically, similar to the theme expressed in Ps 3:6.

<sup>82</sup> Characteristic of several Book I psalms is the stylistic use of a verb with its cognate noun form in the same bicolon (see Pss 1:1c; 14:5a; 22:25b; 25:19b; 27:3a, 5b, 6b). The boldface print is used here to indicate the occurrence of this phenomenon.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Psalm 34

#### *Introduction*

The goal of this reading of Ps 34 is to make use of linguistic and structural “clues” in order to grasp better the poem’s purpose and how it achieved this purpose—in other words, not just what the poem means but how it means. As pointed out by A. Berlin, “to understand how a poem is constructed is to begin to understand what it expresses.”<sup>1</sup> The structural connection between Ps 34 and the previous alphabetic acrostic psalm, Ps 25, was highlighted in chapter three. Also noted was the existence of linguistic connections between these two innermost Book I acrostics. These linguistic bridges will be explored in detail later in this chapter. But first, attention must be paid to the artistic use of repetition throughout this poem.

The importance of repetition in classical Hebrew poetry has been highlighted earlier in this study. Repetition as a device in poetry, particularly in the Psalms, has been noted by biblical critics, biblical theologians, and literary critics alike. An interesting passing

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<sup>1</sup> Adele Berlin, “The Rhetoric of Psalm 145,” in *Biblical and Related Studies Presented to Samuel Iwry* (ed. Ann Kort and Scott Morschauser; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1985), 18. She also notes: “The potential success of rhetorical criticism lies in the fact that the devices and symmetries that are present in a poem are not merely decorations – esthetically pleasing ornaments surrounding the meaning – but are pointers or signs which indicate what the meaning is” (17). Berlin’s approach in her work is influenced not only by James Muilenberg’s work but also by the insights of Roman Jakobson. Similarly, LarsOlov Eriksson notes that “the style and structure of a psalm are closely connected with its content . . . Therefore, style, structure, and content must be seen and considered together” in his *Come, Children, Listen to Me!: Psalm 34 in the Hebrew Bible and in Early Christian Writings* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1991), 34.

comment by M. Buber deserves notice. In his philosophical treatise on good and evil, he comments in connection with Ps 1: “The recurrence of . . . keywords is a basic law of composition in the Psalms. This law has a poetic significance – rhythmical correspondence of sound values . . .”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, L. J. Liebreich emphasizes the significance of repeated keywords in Ps 34. He convincingly argues for Ps 34 as a poetic *Kunstwerk* (in contrast to H. Gunkel’s assessment) and provides an interesting outline of the structure of this psalm based upon the repetition of keywords.<sup>3</sup> Years later, reflecting upon Ps 34 and upon Liebreich’s analysis, M. Girard says: “Ps 34 is a gem of structural art.”<sup>4</sup>

Liebreich’s article, in fact, provides a good beginning place for a discussion of repetition in Ps 34. Such repetition of keywords may involve repetition of formal elements such as rhyme, alliteration, sound and word roots and/or repetition of thematic

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Buber, *Good and Evil: Two Interpretations* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1953), 52. See also James Muilenberg, “A Study in Hebrew Rhetoric: Repetition and Style,” in *Congress Volume, Copenhagen* (VTSup 1; Leiden: The Netherlands, 1953), 99-110 (especially). Repetition is, of course, a powerful literary tool in non-biblical literature as well. See especially poignant comments by A. B. Lord, “Characteristics of Orality,” *OrTra* 2 (1987): 57-62. See also Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (LAI; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 13-14.

<sup>3</sup> Leon J. Liebreich, “Psalms 34 and 145 in the Light of Their Key Words” *HUCA* 27 (1956): 181-92.

<sup>4</sup> Marc Girard, *Les Psaumes: Analyse Structurelle et Interprétation, 1-50* (RNS-2; Montréal: Editions Bellarmin, 1984), 273: “Le Ps 34 est un bijou d’art structurel” [my translation].

elements such as synonymous terms and concepts.<sup>5</sup> Sound patterns or the “sound shape”<sup>6</sup> of the poetic language of the Psalms is an often-overlooked type of repetition. In fact, T. McCreesh laments “. . . the unfortunate fact that for the modern investigator of the [Old Testament], Hebrew words are largely signs to be seen, not words to be heard.”<sup>7</sup> Both of these types of repetition, grammatical and semantic, are frequent in the Psalms and are significant in describing “how” a poem communicates meaning.

### *Repetitions and Parallelisms*

The name YHWH first appears in the *aleph* line of the poem (v. 2) and occurs some sixteen times in the entire poem. The last appearance of this name is in the last bi-colon of the poem, in the additional *pe* line that follows the *tav* line in the alphabetic acrostic.<sup>8</sup> Several other psalms in Book I prior to Ps 34 also contain occurrences of YHWH in over half their verses: Pss 3; 6; 12; 14; 27; 28; 29; 30 and 33. In his 1953 work, J. Muilenberg discusses four functions of repetition in the biblical writings. Three of these deserve mention here: (1) repetition sometimes is used by writers to underscore or emphasize the semantic meaning of the language, (2) sometimes repetition functions to push the

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<sup>5</sup> Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1968), 6, 38-39. Cf. 166, 168.

<sup>6</sup> This terminology borrowed from the title of the book by Roman Jakobson and Linda R. Waugh, *The Sound Shape of Language* (3d ed.; ed. Linda R. Waugh; Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Thomas P. McCreesh, *Biblical Sound and Sense: Poetic Sound Patterns in Proverbs 10-29* (JSOTSup 128; Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1991), 14.

<sup>8</sup> On the significance of this additional *pe* line in Pss 25 and 34 see Anthony R. Ceresko, “The ABCs of Wisdom in Psalm XXXIV,” *VT* 35 (1985): 99-103 and the discussion in chapter three of this study.

development of thought forward or provide continuity or “flow” to the thought(s) being expounded, and (3) repetition often functions to bring structure to the passage.<sup>9</sup>

In Ps 34 the most interesting repetitions of YHWH involve the structure of the poem. This structure is laid out in Liebreich’s basic outline of the poem: section I (vv. 2-4); section II (vv. 5-11); section III (vv. 12-15) and section IV (vv. 16-23).<sup>10</sup> Sections II and IV are connected structurally by means of the same number of repetitions of the divine name YHWH. These two sections account for twelve of the sixteen occurrences of YHWH in the psalm. There are six occurrences in section II (vv. 5, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11)<sup>11</sup> and six occurrences in section IV (vv. 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, and 23). This preponderance of repeated references to Yahweh is striking, both visually and aurally. It is interesting to note that these two sections account for twelve of the occurrences of the name YHWH in this psalm in light of the number twelve and its theologically-significant relationship to the people of God known as Israel.<sup>12</sup> Upon closer examination, these two sections semantically and thematically focus upon the people of God and Yahweh’s care and protection of them (vv. 5b, 7b, 8c, 10b, 11b, 16, 18b, 19b, 20b, and 23).

Also, within each of these two sections there appears to be a consistent, predominant pattern of ordering the six occurrences of the term YHWH. Looking closer at the six

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<sup>9</sup> Muilenberg, “A Study in Hebrew Rhetoric,” 99.

<sup>10</sup> Liebreich, “Psalms 34 and 145,” 183.

<sup>11</sup> Eriksson observes that out of the sixteen occurrences of the term YHWH, “no less than thirteen are in the first halves of the lines” and says this is “noteworthy.” See his *Come, Children, Listen to Me!*, 36. Unfortunately he does not speak to the functional significance of this phenomenon and I am at a loss to comprehend the poetic/structural function of this fact.

<sup>12</sup> See especially: Gen 49:28; Exod 24:4, 28:21-29 (39:14); Lev 24:5-8; Num 7:84-87, 31:5; Deut 1:23; Josh 3:12, 4:2-4, 8-9, 20; 1 Kgs 18:31; and Ezek 47:13.

occurrences in section II, one notices that YHWH appears alternatively as the third word, as the fourth word, and then again as the third word in the respective lines in five out of the six occurrences (vv. 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10). Similarly, in section IV there appears to be a consistent internal patterning with respect to the position of the term YHWH in the respective lines. The term YHWH occurs as the second word in its line in five out of the six occurrences of the term (vv. 16, 17, 18, 19, and 23). These tightly patterned repetitions of YHWH in these two sections of the psalm, one section at the beginning of the psalm and the other at the end, provide a powerful way of tying together these two sections of the poem.

This example of structural parallelism lends a certain balance to the poem and prompts one to look for any other similarities in structure between sections II and IV. There are in fact a couple of additional parallels in vv. 7 and 18 (sections II and IV respectively). First, the phrase “and YHWH listened” (וַיִּהוּהוּ שָׁמַע) is repeated in vv. 7a and 18a in completion of the statements that a righteous person(s) called or cried out. Second, the phrase “and delivered him/saves them from all his/their troubles” (וּמְכַל-צָרוֹתָיו הוֹשִׁיעַ/הַצִּילֵם).<sup>13</sup> The effect of such semantic and syntactical paralleling and repetition between sections II and IV is to underscore the theological message of

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<sup>13</sup> The two roots meaning “to save, deliver, rescue” (יָשַׁע and נָצַל) are used synonymously elsewhere in this psalm (vv. 19 and 20; vv. 5 and 7). These two terms are used interchangeably in the second half-lines of vv. 7 and 18. In connection with vv. 5 and 7, silly inattention to the grammatical parallelism to the first half-lines (i.e., Subject / Verb / Direct Object / Verb) causes Willem VanGemeren to say of v. 7: “The psalmist may actually point to someone in the audience as he says, ‘this poor man’” in his “Psalms”, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (ed. Frank E. Gaebelin; vol. 5; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 283. The syntactical parallelism or repetition is duly noted by Eriksson, *Come, Children, Listen to Me!*, 37.

these two sections: YHWH is a delivering God who is attentive to those who call upon him; a saving *refuge*<sup>14</sup> who is close to those who are crushed and fear him.

M. Girard argues for a chiasmic structure tying together the section vv. 5-18.<sup>15</sup> While it is difficult to agree with his assessment of a fully developed chiasmus, there are definitely echoes of vv. 5-7 in the terms in vv. 15-18. Examples are the repeated two phrases just discussed: **ויהוה שמע** and **הושיעו/הצילם . . . ומכל**. Additionally, a careful reading notes the following repeated term shared by these two sections of the poem: **פני / ופניהם** (vv. 6, 17). Similarly, vv. 8-11 share a repeated phrase with vv. 12-15: **יראת (YHWH) / ליראיו** (vv. 8, 12).

Verses 2-3 also contain an interesting use of sound parallelism and a use of semantic parallelism in two of their clauses: **תהלתו בפי** (v. 2) and **תתהלל נפשי** (v. 3). First, both sound and semantic parallelism is seen in the repetition of the **הלל** root in the words **תהלתו** and **תתהלל**. This parallelism of sound, to a lesser extent, and of semantic meaning (involving synonymous terms) is again repeated in the other two words in these clauses: **נפשי** and **בפי**. As noted by Jakobson, the various types of morphological or syntactical parallelisms in poetry are interwoven with semantic literary devices and can even rival “the artistic role of verbal [i.e., semantic] tropes.”<sup>16</sup> This observation is

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<sup>14</sup> Another parallel between these two sections is the root **חסה** which occurs in the poem exclusively in vv. 9 and 23.

<sup>15</sup> Girard, *Les Psaumes*, 269.

<sup>16</sup> Roman Jakobson, “Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry,” in *Language in Literature* (ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy; Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap/Harvard, 1987), 121. Compare J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Poetry: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001) who, in a discussion

certainly true with respect to Hebrew poetry in the psalms. The various types of morphological parallelisms often work to reinforce the semantic parallels.<sup>17</sup> Such reinforcement of semantic correspondences by means of grammatical correspondences is certainly at work here in 34:2-3, in connection with the terms noted above. Petersen and Richards assure us that this type of reinforcement is a trait of Hebrew poetry outside of the Psalter. In fact, the examples they cite come from wisdom texts (Job, Proverbs), from Torah texts (Deuteronomy), and from prophetic texts (Joel, Jeremiah).<sup>18</sup>

Now these last two terms obviously do not share a common root (as do תהלתו and תהלה) but these two terms, translated “my mouth” and “my soul” respectively, are synonymous terms used to refer to the individual person in the Hebrew Bible including, of course, the Psalter.<sup>19</sup> In these two phrases from Ps 34:2-3, the careful reader notes two separate instances of both semantic *and* sound repetition. What is the function of this repetition? Before proposing an answer to that question, one additional instance of phonemic and morphological parallelism within verse 3 should be discussed.

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of semantically related word pairs, points out that the overall structure controls the selection of specific terms. This situation attends because “the whole is more than the sum of its parts, as hermeneutics (the art of explaining) has known for centuries” (65).

<sup>17</sup> David L. Petersen and Kent H. Richards, *Interpreting Hebrew Poetry* (GBS, OT Series; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 32.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-34.

<sup>19</sup> For a classic discussion of the various synonymous terms used to refer to the individual in the Hebrew Bible see, Hans W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974; repr., Mifflintown, Pa.: Sigler Press, 1996), 7, 11, 74, 77-78. See also Claus Westermann, “נפש” in *TLOT*, 2:744, 745-47 on the meaning “throat, gullet, hunger.”

At the very end of v. 3, one discovers the clause: **ישמעו ענוים וישמחו**. This clause attracts both the ear and the eye of the reader because of the repetition of the phonemes **ש/ש**, each in turn followed by the repetition of the phoneme **מ**. Then the two verbs in this clause follow the **מ** phoneme in each word with a pharyngeal guttural (**ע** and **ח** respectively).<sup>20</sup> Finally, both of these terms end with the phoneme **ו** which is repetitious in terms of both sound and morphology.

What is the function of this multi-faceted repetition and parallelism in vv. 2-3? The repetition and parallelism of forms and sounds serves to emphasize the important opening note of praise for YHWH and provides an interesting connection with v. 7 where the “afflicted” person is once again mentioned. This parallelism, of course, includes the sound and semantic connection between “my mouth” and “my soul” phrases mentioned above. This thematic connection between vv. 2-3 and v. 7 is easily seen in the following paraphrase of the verses: in vv. 2-3 the psalmist blesses and praises Yahweh and the afflicted (**ענוים**) hear (**שמעו** root); then in v. 7 the afflicted (**עני**) person—the psalmist—calls out and Yahweh hears (**שמעו** root).<sup>21</sup> This theological theme of YHWH’s

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<sup>20</sup> Paul Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (trans. and rev. T. Muraoka; 2 vols.; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1996), 1:25 (sec. 5j). Benjamin Hrushovski refers to this artistic device as “root rhyming” and cites the following additional examples: Gen. 11:9 (**בלבל . . . בבל**); Jdg. 14:12 (**חודה . . . אחודה**); Prv. 3:29 (**רעה רעה . . . אל . . . אל**) in “Prosody, Hebrew,” *Encyclopedia Judaica* (16 vols.; New York: MacMillan, 1971-72), 13:1202.

<sup>21</sup> M. Girard, *Les Psaumes*, 273 notes the important role of the repeated root **שמעו** in the structure of the entire poem. This root occurs a total of four times in Ps 34 (vv. 3, 7, 12, 18). The four occurrences are basically equally spaced throughout the poem, appearing in the opening section which features an individual (singular) subject of

protective, providential sustenance and care, emphasized here in the first seven bi-cola of the poem, is a major theme in the rest of the poem (see especially vv. 8-11, 16, 18-21, 23).

The function of the structure and form of Ps 34:2-7 to underscore the important opening thoughts of this poem is comparable to the function of the alliteration (form) in the opening cola of Ps 9 (vv. 2-3). As will be remembered from earlier in this study (chapter 2), the *aleph*-initial lines of Ps 9 also contain an א at the beginning of each of the four verbs that open the four cola contained in 9:2-3.<sup>22</sup> In Ps 9 such phonemic repetition serves to underscore the positive note of praise with which the poem begins (9:2-13).

#### *Consequentiality in Parallelism*

Before moving on through the poem, attention must be given to the dynamic movement from the first bi-cola to the second bi-cola in each line. As R. Alter points out, at least two-thirds of the instances of parallelism in biblical verse involve some sort of movement or forward progression from the first half of the line to the second half of the same line. This movement, he observes, is “towards a focusing, a heightening . . . a sort of crescendo development.”<sup>23</sup> One such type of development is what Alter calls

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Yahweh’s care; in the closing section which features a communal (plural) subject of Yahweh’s care; and in the center (didactic) section of the poem.

<sup>22</sup> See J. P. Fokkelman, *The Psalms in Form: The Hebrew Psalter in its Poetic Shape* (Leiden: Deo Publishing, 2002), 22 for a powerful visual presentation of this repetition.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic, 1985), 29. Compare the early comments by J. Muilenburg, “Hebrew Rhetoric,” 98. See also Adele Berlin’s,

*consequentiality* in which the second half of the line is “parallel” in the sense that it states the consequences that follow the action in the first half of the line. In other words, the first half of the line states the cause and the second half of the line states the effect. He refers to the function of this poetic literary device as *narrativity*,<sup>24</sup> that is to say, the “narrative development of metaphor.”<sup>25</sup> The second part of the bi-colon is not merely synonymous or repetitive but adds something to the progression of thought.<sup>26</sup>

Examples of this consequential or narrative-like development are seen throughout Ps 34, beginning with verse 3: “My soul glories in Yahweh; the afflicted ones hear and they rejoice!” Another instance of consequentiality is found in verse 6: “Men look to him and are radiant; and their faces are not shamed.” Similarly, in verses 5, 7, 10, 18 and 23 the second lines describe or narrate the consequences of the actions in the first lines of these verses. This development of thought can best be seen in the following table.

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*The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 141, and Paul P. Saydon, “Assonance in Hebrew as a Means of Expressing Emphasis,” *Bib* 36, 1 (1955): 36-50. Saydon points out that assonance is a “literary phenomenon common to all languages, ancient and modern” (36). While he does not comment specifically on Ps 34, he does comment on Pss 35:23; 14:1//53:2; and 118:11.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-32, 37-38.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>26</sup> See also James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1981). Kugel speaks in terms of the second half of the line providing a kind of “progression” (9); of going beyond the statement in the first half of the line— “the meaning of B is indeed . . . a ‘going one better.’” (8). Cf. pp. 12 (second half of the line brings sharpness); 13, 23 (“A is so, and what’s more B”); 29, 42-45, 51-52.

TABLE 8  
 EXAMPLES OF CONSEQUENTIALITY IN PS 34

Initial Statement	Subsequent Consequence
V. 5: "I sought Yahweh and he answered me;	and from all my terrors he delivered me."
V. 7: "This afflicted one called out and Yahweh heard;	and from all his troubles he saved him."
V. 10: "Fear Yahweh, you his holy ones;	for there is nothing lacking for those who fear him."

In his paradigmatic analysis of Ps 18, Alter provides a statistical breakdown of the varieties of semantic relations between the individual cola in each line.<sup>27</sup> This breakdown is instructive in seeing the structure of that poem and so a similar breakdown of Ps 34 should prove helpful in this study. Out of twenty-two total lines in Ps 34, there is what Alter would call "dynamic movement" from the first half of the line to the second half of the line in twelve lines. The specific twelve out of twenty-two lines are found in verses: 2, 3, 5-10, 16-18 and 23. Over half of these (seven) are to be accounted for by the lines that evidence *consequentiality* as discussed earlier. The other five lines (vv. 2, 8, 9, 16 and 17) are examples of specification or intensification.

What is the apparent function of this consequential completion of the first cola by the second cola in each of these eight lines? Alter's concept of narrativity is intriguing. He argues that the "narrative impulse in the poems" can contribute to their "liveliness."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Alter, *Biblical Poetry*, 32-33.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

In Psalm 34 this consequential “parallelism” or seconding has the effect of engaging the auditor, drawing him/her into the poem and moving the auditor (or reader) through a narration or story of YHWH’s personal care and protection of those who in their affliction and godly fear turn towards him. This message can be seen by juxtaposing a reading of the seven consequential second lines:

- Vs. 3: . . . “the afflicted ones hear and they rejoice”  
 Vs. 5: . . . “and from all my terrors he delivered me”  
 Vs. 6: . . . “and their faces are not shamed”  
 Vs. 7: . . . “and from all his troubles he saved him”  
 Vs. 10: . . . “for there is nothing lacking for those who fear him”  
 Vs. 18: . . . “and from all their troubles he delivers them”  
 Vs. 23: . . . “and all those who take refuge in him shall not be condemned.”<sup>29</sup>

### *Specific Artistic Components*

One of the structural characteristics of Ps 34 is the three complementary imperatives in vv. 9-10—“taste,” “see,” and “fear” (Yahweh).<sup>30</sup> These three successive imperatives

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<sup>29</sup> Compare comments on the last distiches of vv. 8, 12 [sic?], 19, 23 in Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 303. See also Girard, *Les Psaumes*: “L’inclusion des v. 5b et 18b encadre et unifie le diptyque tout entire. *Mikkol* et le verbe *hissil* sont termes communs. Les deux substantives, synonymes, s’équivalent. Seul diffère le suffixe du verbe. Le passage du « je » au « ils » exprime à merveille tout le mouvement du diptyque: ayant vécu lui-même une expérience de salut, le psalmiste s’en sert comme sujet d’instruction sapientelle. Ce qui vaut pour lui vaut pareillement pour tous les justes” (270) (“The inclusion of v. 5b and 18b frames and unifies the entire diptych. *Mikkol* and the verb *hissil* are shared terms. The two nouns, synonyms, are themselves equivalent. Only the suffix of the verb differs. The transition from “I” to “they” marvelously expresses the entire movement of the diptych: having himself lived a memorable experience, the psalmist uses it as a topic for instruction in wisdom. What is worthwhile for him is similarly worthwhile for all the righteous ones”) [my translation]. Similarly, Kent H. Richards, “Psalm 34,” *Int* 40 (1986): 177.

<sup>30</sup> See VanGemenen, “Psalms,” 284. N. Herman Ridderbos, of course, identifies “das Fürchten Jahwes” (the fear of Yahweh) as one of the keywords in vv. 10-15 in his

build climactically upon each other in that if the hearer/reader will follow the psalmist's advice to "taste" and "see" (i.e., personally experience Yahweh) then the reader will come to "fear" Yahweh and thus need nothing. These three imperatives in quick succession serve to tie together vv. 9-11 in that those who taste Yahweh's goodness are satisfied (v. 9), while in stark contrast the young lions suffer life-threatening hunger (v. 11). One additional phrase repetition functions to reinforce the connection between vv. 9-11. In v. 9a and then in v. 11b a careful reading discovers the repetition of the similar sounding phrases כִּי־טוֹב (v. 9a) and כָּל־טוֹב (v. 11b). K. Hanson also highlights the chiasmic structure of vv. 8-11 (A:B:B':A') on a sentence level, although his observation needs some modification. He says that v. 8 contains a promise (A); v. 9, an invitation (B); v. 10 contains another invitation (B') and v. 11, another promise (A').<sup>31</sup> Verse 10b, however, contains not an invitation but a statement of promise. Nevertheless, Hanson is correct in noting a pattern of thought in the subsection vv. 8-11—promise (v. 8a); invitation (v. 9); invitation (v. 10a); and promise (v. 11). This pattern can be seen clearly via the following table.

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*Die Psalmen: Stilistische Verfahren und Aufbau mit besonderer Berücksichtigung von Ps 1-41* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1972), 28.

<sup>31</sup> K. C. Hanson, "Alphabetic Acrostics: A Form Critical Study" (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1984), 78. Compare similar observation by J. P. Fokkelman, *Major Poems of the Hebrew Bible: At the Interface of Prosody and Structural Analysis* (trans. Ch. E. Smit; 3 vols.; Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1998-2003), 3:55.

TABLE 9

## ALTERNATING STATEMENTS OF “PROMISE” AND “INVITATION”

Promises		Invitations
	V. 8a	V. 9
A	חנה מלאך־יהוה סביב ליראיו ויחלצם	טעמו וראו כ־טוב יהוה אשרי הגבר
		B יחסה־בו
	V. 11	V. 10a
	כפידים רשו ורעבו ודרשי יהוה לא־יחסרו	יראו את־יהוה קדשיו
A'	כל־טוב	כ־אין מחסור ליראיו

In another interesting development, the poet skillfully uses the earthy connotation of “taste” (טעם), surprisingly with Yahweh as the object,<sup>32</sup> to contrast the righteous psalmist and those who heed his exhortation with the lions (the wicked) who are enemies of the psalmist and of Yahweh.<sup>33</sup> This sensorial language in v. 9 raises the question of whether or not this psalm shows evidence of other such concrete language. In fact, it does, containing several references to body parts when either talking about the righteous or about Yahweh. This phenomenon is a striking feature of this psalm’s language. Note

<sup>32</sup> Several commentators notice this unusually sensorial language but do not make the direct connection between “taste” (v. 9) and “hunger” (v. 11). See, for example: H.-J. Kraus, *Psalms 1-59* (trans. Hilton C. Oswald; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988; repr., Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 384; Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50* (WBC 19; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983), 279; C. A. and E. G. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (ICC; 2 vols.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1906), 1:297.

<sup>33</sup> Artur Weiser refers to the “extravagant contrast” between the lions and those who find their refuge in God in his *The Psalms* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 298. Similarly Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*: “. . . young lions symbolize the essence of self-sufficiency in the provision of physical needs . . . those who fear the Lord are not self-sufficient . . . And yet, as the psalmist demonstrates, it is the self-sufficient predators of this world who would lack, while the God-fearing would have all their needs met” (280).

the following phrases: “in my mouth” (בפי , v. 2b); “my soul” (נפשי , v. 3a); “their faces” (ופניהם , v. 6b); “your tongue” (לשונך , v. 14a); “eyes of YHWH” (עיני יהוה , v. 16a); “his ears” (ואזניו , v. 16b); “face of YHWH” (פני יהוה , v. 17a); “heart” (לב , v. 19a); “his bones” (עצמותיו , v. 21a); and finally, “soul” (נפש , v. 23a). Ten times in this poem, an average of once every other verse, the psalmist uses such language.<sup>34</sup>

The final mention of נפש is additionally interesting because of the *inclusio*-type connection it forges between the end of the poem and the beginning of the poem (נפשי in v. 3). This *inclusio* is further confirmed by the sound similarities (repetition) found in the terms ישמעו and יאשמנו in vv. 3 and 23 respectively.<sup>35</sup> This connection between the first and the last section of the poem also subtly functions to equate the worshipping psalmist (v. 3) with the servants of Yahweh whose soul(s) the LORD ransoms (v. 23). This envelope device further contributes to the overall unity and progression of the poem (thematically) since elsewhere in the poem the worshipper is intimately involved in the community of Yahweh’s servants—more specifically in exhorting them to worship and to experience Yahweh (vv. 4, 9a, 10a, 12, 14, 15).

This sensorial, concrete language is a trait of Psalm 34 and is a stylistic feature seen to some extent in the previous two acrostic psalms in Book I of the collection. First, this language-style is a further point of contact between the structurally similar Pss 25 and 34 since Ps 25 does share some of Ps 34’s proclivity towards this type of language (see Ps

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<sup>34</sup> On this topic, see Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher, “Body Images in the Psalms,” *JSOT* 28 (March 2004): 301-26.

<sup>35</sup> This *inclusio* structure is also noted by Fokkelman who refers to the repetition between vv. 3-4 and 22-23 as an “echo,” in his *Major Poems*, 3:51.

25:1a, 13a, 15a, 15b, 17a, and 20a). Second, with respect to Ps 9/10, Ps 10 also makes use of several terms that refer to the body parts of either people or of Yahweh (Ps 10:3a, 7a, 7b, 8b, 11a, 11b, 12a, 13b, 14a, 15a, and 17b).

As far as recognized rhetorical and poetical devices are concerned, in 34:10 there is an instance of polyptoton or ending a line with the same root (in a different form) that appeared at the first of the line.<sup>36</sup> Jakobson speaks of this device functioning to connect or tie together lines in a particular poem while another literary critic says “this device . . . increases patterning without wearying the ear.”<sup>37</sup> This special type of repetition of a word root obviously functions to emphasize the semantic and phonological unity of this line in the poem. It is not surprising that this root is one of this psalm’s keywords, being repeated also in vv. 8 and 12 (לִירְאִיו and יִרְאֵה respectively).

#### *Inter-textual Links*

Looking outside Ps 34 for a moment, one should note that there is an instance of polyptoton in Ps 25:9 involving the root יָרַךְ. In both Ps 25 and in Ps 34 this artistic device occurs in the *yod*-line. This phenomenon is an additional structural link

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<sup>36</sup> R. Jakobson discusses various occurrences of this artistic device in secular literatures in his “Linguistics and Poetics,” “Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry,” and “Grammatical Parallelism,” in *Language in Literature*, 90, 131, 157, and 160 respectively.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 157, 160, and T. V. F. Brogan, “Polyptoton,” in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (ed. Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan; Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 967. See also T. McCreech, *Biblical Sound and Sense*, 76 for a discussion of this device in Gen. 9:6 and in the book of Proverbs.

between these two acrostic poems that are already recognized as structurally similar due to their identical line structures (22 lines of 2-cola lines) in each poem.<sup>38</sup>

One additional intriguing connection between Pss 25 and 34 involves identical initial word roots in several lines in the last halves of these poems. One might be tempted to assume that this phenomenon is characteristic of all of the alphabetic acrostic poems in Book I but a comparison with Ps 9/10 and Ps 37 shows that this assumption is not the case. There is apparently, therefore, another structural connection between Pss 25 and 34 in this regard. The pertinent verses/lines are as follows:

34:13 // 25:12 (the מ lines): מִי־הָאֵשׁ // מִי־הָאֵשׁ

34:16 // 25:15 (the ע lines): עֵינֵי יְהוָה // עֵינֵי יְהוָה

34:17 // 25:16 (the פ lines): פְּנֵה root // פְּנֵה root

34:21 // 25:20 (the ש lines): שָׁמֵר root // שָׁמֵר root

34:23 // 25:22 (the additional פ lines): פָּדָה root.

Another word root/sound repetition occurs in the second half-lines of 34:10-11.

This repetition involves the root חסר and serves to underscore the semantic meaning of the two clauses as noted in the following translation:

Fear YHWH, you his saints!  
for there is nothing *lacking* [מחסר] for those who fear him.

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<sup>38</sup> David N. Freedman, *Psalm 119: The Exaltation of Torah* (with Jeffrey C. Geoghegan and Andrew Welch; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 2-3. An additional interesting similarity between Pss 25 and 34, when book I of the Psalter is read canonically, is that each poem is preceded by poems that: (1) tout Yahweh as creator (Pss 24:1-2; 33:6-9) and (2) contain a theologically significant phrase that will be repeated in Pss 25 and 34 respectively: 24:4 / 25:1 – “נִפְשֵׁי אֲשָׁא” / “נִפְשֵׁי יְהוָה”; 33:18 / 34:16 – “עֵין יְהוָה אֵל” / “עֵינֵי יְהוָה אֵל”.

Young lions are in desperate need and they hunger,  
but those who seek YHWH *lack* [יחסרן] nothing good.<sup>39</sup>

Additionally, the repeated root חסר in these two clauses serves to emphasize the poet's synonymy of the two phrases referring to the righteous: "those who fear (YHWH)" (v. 10b) and "those who seek YHWH" (v. 11b). Such repetition of not only the semantic root but also of the sounds involved functions to do more than just unite a sequence of words. Words that have different denotative meanings, not to mention synonymous terms, can be connected by similarities in sound.<sup>40</sup> Here in vv. 10-11 such sound patterning contributes to the defining of those who seek Yahweh as those who also fear him.

The poet also employs a chiasmic pattern with respect to vv. 10b and 11b:<sup>41</sup>

"... for there is nothing lacking"	A
"... for those who fear [YHWH]"	B
"... but those who seek YHWH"	B'
"... lack nothing good"	A'

This paralleling of these two designations for the righteous is important because both of these terms ליראיו and דרש are keywords elsewhere in this psalm (vv. 5, 8). A close reading of v. 12 reveals artistic components within the literary world of this poem as well

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<sup>39</sup> Compare the translation by S. Terrien, *Psalms*, 301.

<sup>40</sup> T. McCreesh, *Biblical Sound and Sense*, 25; Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," in *Selected Writings* (ed. Stephen Rudy; 8 vols.; The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton, 1981), 3:43.

<sup>41</sup> See J. P. Fokkelman's comment on artistic/structural devices in the Psalms in his *Major Poems*, 1:9: "[the poet] may arrange two bi-cola by forcing the four half verses into a chiasmic order."

as additional links to Ps 25—the earlier acrostic in Book I that is a “wisdom literature influenced” poem and that has structural affinities with Ps 34.<sup>42</sup>

First, one notices that in the *lamed*-line of the psalm, which is also the center of the psalm, the poet inserts the didactic section of the psalm. This line strikes a didactic tone at the center of the poem by the mentioning of the “fear” (יראת) of Yahweh and by the use of the verb למד. A. Ceresko long ago made some interesting observations about the occurrence of this verb and the *lamed*-line at the center of this psalm in his argument for the wisdom literature form and setting of this poem.<sup>43</sup> T. Collins, in fact, argues that the “total message” of the Psalter (at least on one level) is a didactic statement since the whole book deals with the problem of evil in the world and the related issue of the suffering of the righteous.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> On the structural affinities between Pss 25 and 34, see Freedman, *Psalm 119*, 2-3. On the wisdom influence in Pss 25 and 34, see Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 319, 383 and Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 217-18, 278. Specifically on the sapiential flavor of Ps 34:10-15, see Ridderbos, *Die Psalmen*, 249.

<sup>43</sup> A. R. Ceresko, “The ABCs of Wisdom,” 100-103. Cf. Roland E. Murphy, *The Gift of the Psalms* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2000), 15-16.

<sup>44</sup> Terence Collins, “Decoding the Psalms: A Structural Approach to the Psalter” *JSOT* 37 (1987): 47, 56, 59, n. 14. Cf. p. 46. Mowinckel pointed out the didactic tone of the Psalter due to its final collection and form being produced in “learned circles,” in his *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship* (trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas; 2 vols.; New York: Abingdon, 1967), 2:204-5 (cf. 2:104-6, 114). Compare Brevard S. Childs, “Reflections on the Modern Study of the Psalms,” in *Magnalia Dei, the Mighty Acts of God* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976), 382, 384, and 385. Earlier, Claus Westermann proposed the idea that the collection Pss 1-119 being an early, short Psalter that had become “the word of God which is read, studied, and meditated upon” in his *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, (trans. Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen; Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 253. This material originally appeared in “Zur Sammlung des Psalters,” *ThViat* 8 (1961/62): 278-84. Compare Svend Holm-Nielsen, “The Importance of Late Jewish Psalmody for the Understanding of the Old Testament Psalmody Tradition,” *ST* 14 (1960): 7-9, 19-20.

Structurally speaking, the work of J. Bazak on numerical devices is very interesting with respect to v. 12. Bazak's focus is upon symmetrical balance within the psalms based upon the counting of words. For example, he notes that in Ps 23 the "central expression" is the v. 4 phrase **עִמְדִי כִּי־אִתְּךָ**, "for you are with me." This phrase is central, argues Bazak, primarily because "this expression begins 26 words after the beginning of the psalm and ends the same number of words, 26, from the end of the psalm."<sup>45</sup> Jakobson reminds us that symmetry contributes "potency and eloquence" to a poem.<sup>46</sup> Bazak is not, however, arguing for the mere numerical or symmetrical centrality of this phrase in v. 4. He also convincingly makes the point that the expression voices the "central idea of the psalm, i.e. that the close feeling of God's presence is [the poet's] highest wish."<sup>47</sup>

Applying Bazak's approach to Ps 34:12 yields some interesting observations. Excluding the first verse which contains the title/superscription of the acrostic poem,<sup>48</sup> there are seventy-seven words counting from v. 2 through v. 12a and seventy-seven words counting from v. 13 through v. 23. This numerical structure (Bazak's terminology) serves to highlight v. 12b and its phrase **יִרְאֵת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם** as the symmetrically-central phrase of this poem. Another observation is in order here. Apparently, the non-alphabetic, non-acrostic psalms are not unique in their use of this

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<sup>45</sup> Jacob Bazak, "Numerical Devices in Biblical Poetry," *VT* 38 (1988): 334.

<sup>46</sup> R. Jakobson, "Yeats' 'Sorrow of Love' Through the Years," in *Selected Writings*, 3:606.

<sup>47</sup> Bazak, "Numerical Devices," 334. He also discusses Pss 92, 81, 34.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 336.

structural artistic device. This device is also used *artistically* by the poet responsible for Ps 34. The device is used in that poem to reinforce *schematically* a motif that is theologically crucial to the message of the psalm.

What are the possible poetic implications of these occurrences at the center of the poem? First, the concept of the “fear of YHWH” (יִרְאֵת יְהוָה) is a key concept in Ps 34 as is evidenced by vv. 8, 10a, 10b and here in v. 12.<sup>49</sup> This concept also interestingly appears at the center of Ps 25. In fact, if one follows the strophic display of Pss 25 and 34 provided by J. Fokkelman,<sup>50</sup> then this mention of the fear of Yahweh appears in the exact center strophe in both of these structurally-similar psalms. That is, Fokkelman breaks down Ps 34 into ten strophes in which the fifth strophe is our *lamed*-initial line that refers to the fear of Yahweh. Similarly, he breaks down Ps 25 into eleven total strophes and the concept of the fear of Yahweh appears in the sixth strophe. The effect, in both Ps 34 and Ps 25, is to highlight the theme of the fear of Yahweh.

Now in Ps 25 there are only two occurrences of the root “fear” (him/YHWH) but these two occurrences are used deftly by the poet to frame another important keyword in that psalm—“covenant” (25:10, 12, 14). This framing is achieved by a chiastic-type paralleling:

Who is the man who fears Yahweh?	A
he shall teach him the way he should choose	B
His soul shall abide in prosperity,	

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<sup>49</sup> Additionally, Fokkelman astutely notes in v. 9a the “pun-like” רֵאָה in his *Major Poems*, 3:53, n. 7. The root יִרְאֵת appears, of course, in v. 8 – the first bi-colon of the strophe of which v. 9 is a part. See also K. C. Hanson, “Alphabetic Acrostics,” 84.

<sup>50</sup> J. Fokkelman, *The Psalms in Form*, 36, 45 respectively. See also Fokkelman’s structural analysis of Ps 34 and his comments on the importance of the two keywords טוֹב and יִרְאֵת in his *Major Poems*, 3:53.

and his descendants will inherit the land C  
 The friendship of Yahweh is for those who fear him A'  
 and he will make known to them his covenant. B'  
 (25:12-14)

In this way the psalmist in Ps 25 ties together the important concept of *covenant* with the proper way that is taught by Yahweh (compare 25:10 on covenant). But in both psalms, the idea of the fear of Yahweh *structurally* takes center stage. This fact is significant in Ps 34 especially when one looks at the other references to this theme. In addition to the fear of Yahweh being mentioned repeatedly, the occurrence of the root “fear” (יִרָא) in v. 10a is one of ten imperatives found in this psalm.<sup>51</sup> Surprisingly, this preponderance of imperatives is yet another structural similarity between Pss 34 and 25. Psalm 25 contains fourteen imperatives.

A sound (auditory) wordplay occurs in Ps 34:13 in conjunction with the repetition of the gutturals ה and ח in the phrase: מִי־הַאִישׁ הַחֹפֵץ חַיִּים אֱהָב. This phenomenon is an example of *consonance*, which is, in fact, a specie of repetition. In this case the repetition does not involve a word, but rather a particular phoneme(s). The function of such repetition is to attract the attention of the hearer as the song is read aloud. As stated in connection with the *lamed*-initial line, this strophe, the fifth out of a total of ten, is at the center of the poem. Verse 13, which is the *mem*-initial line, forms the second half of

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<sup>51</sup> Psalm 34's other nine imperatives are as follows: גִּדְלוּ, v. 4; טַעֲמוּ, v. 9; וּרְאוּ, v. 9; לִכּוּ, v. 12; שִׁמְעוּ, v. 12; נִצְרֵם, v. 14; סֹרוּ, v. 15; וַעֲשׂוּ, v. 15; and וּרְדַפְּהוּ, v. 15. K. C. Hanson claims Ps 34 contains fifteen imperatives (Hanson, “Alphabetic Acrostics,” 93). Perhaps he is reading some of the several cohortatives and jussives as imperatives.

strophe V according to Fokkelman's analysis of the psalm.<sup>52</sup> This central strophe highlights a major motif, the fear of Yahweh, and also initiates the wisdom-influenced didactic section of the psalm (vv. 12-17).

Another function of the four-fold consonance in v. 13 is to underscore the semantic parallelism of two of the terms involved—**חפץ** and **אהב**. The first root means “to desire or to take pleasure in something”<sup>53</sup> while the second root denotes “to like or to love something.”<sup>54</sup> These two roots are obviously used synonymously in the two bi-cola of v. 13.<sup>55</sup> The four-fold consonance involving the gutturals underscores this synonymy.

This wisdom section of Ps 34 evidences intra-textual links with other wisdom-influenced psalms found in Book I: Pss 1; 19; 25:8-10, 12-13; 32:8-11 and 37. This phenomenon is another example of links between Book I psalms highlighted by Brennan.<sup>56</sup> It is also interesting that the pronunciation/punctuation preserved by the

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<sup>52</sup> Fokkelman, *Psalms in Form*, 45.

<sup>53</sup> Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm, eds., *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Study ed.; trans. and ed. M. E. J. Richardson; 2 vols.; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001), 1:339-40.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:17.

<sup>55</sup> See B. Couroyer on the synonymy of the two terms and on a parallel Egyptian wisdom saying from an Amarna inscription in his “Idéal Sapiéntiel en Égypte et en Israël (A Propos du Psaume XXXIV, verset 13),” *RB* 57 (1950): 175, 176-78.

<sup>56</sup> Joseph P. Brennan, “Psalms 1-8: Some Hidden Harmonies” *BTB* 10 (1980): 25-29. There is an *intertextual* parallel between the **ט**-initial lines of Ps 34:9 and Nah 1:7 (Nah 1:2-8 is a partial alphabetic acrostic). In both of these **ט** lines the following terms/roots occur: **יהוה טוב** and **יחסה בי / חסי**. On the fascinating area of intertextuality and the Psalms see Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms Through the Lens of Intertextuality* (StBL 26; New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 49-51, 70-73, 167-68. On the psalmody and prophecy connection, see Terrien, *Psalms*, 12, 28, 33.

Nakdanim, the scribes who added the vowel points to the text,<sup>57</sup> evidences an alternation between the *hireq-yod* and the *sere* in the final syllables: אַהַב, חַיִּים, הַחֲפִיץ, מִי־הָאֵשׁ.

### *Additional Artistic Components*

A close reading of the end of the psalm reveals at least three interesting artistic components in verse 20. First, there is a sound wordplay between the opening two words in the line: רַבּוֹת and רַעוֹת. This wordplay operates on two levels. It appeals to the hearer's auditory sense in the repetition of two consonantal sounds and one vowel sound. It also appeals to the reader's sense of sight as these two terms share the following consonants: ר, ו, and ת.<sup>58</sup>

Second, this opening wordplay in v. 20 also draws attention to two word roots that are semantically antonyms and are here juxtaposed. The roots are רַעַה and צַדִּיק. Up to this point in the poem, and in a verse after v. 20, these two terms are contrasted by the poet (vv. 14-17, 22).<sup>59</sup> One of the effects of this juxtaposition of antonyms is to jar the auditor/reader, to provoke attention to the climactic end of the poem in which the psalmist contrasts the fates of the wicked and the righteous in a way reminiscent of the climactic end of Ps 1 (compare Pss 1:4-6 and 34:20-23). Particularly important is the

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<sup>57</sup> Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament* (2d ed.; trans. Erroll F. Rhodes; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 13.

<sup>58</sup> Compare an earlier instance of sound wordplay in v. 11a: רַשׁוּ וְרַעְבוּ. The sound wordplay that occurs in v. 22a, רַשָׁע רַעַה, will be discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>59</sup> Vv. 14, 15, and 17 contain the form רַע ("evil"). The form found in v. 20, רַעַה, is the feminine form of this root. See further Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT*, 2:1251-52, 1262-63.

theme, repeated in 1:6 and 34:22, of the demise of the wicked (רשע / רשעים) and the deliverance of the righteous (צדיק/צדיקים). By means of this ending, Ps 34, widely recognized as a wisdom-influenced poem,<sup>60</sup> reaches back to make contact with the first wisdom-influenced psalm in Book I—Psalm 1.

Third, v. 5a, at the beginning of the psalm and v. 20a, at the end of the psalm, share the repeated terms: מכל and נצל. J. Bazak argues that these two sentences are parallel numerically, v. 5b appearing twenty-four words from the beginning of the psalm and v. 20b appearing twenty-four words from the end of the psalm.<sup>61</sup> While this latter figure does not seem to be accurate (I count twenty-two words from vv. 21-23), Bazak is accurate in his observation that v. 5 is three verses from the beginning of the poem while v. 20 is, of course, three verses from the end of the poem.<sup>62</sup>

There is yet another sound wordplay in verse 22. This wordplay, however, involves not just a play on sound repetition and a visual play on the repetition of consonants but also involves irony wrapped up in the semantic values of the terms and in the accompanying imagery of personification. The two terms are רשע and רעה and are basically translated into English as “wicked” (person)” and “evil” respectively.<sup>63</sup> Similar

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<sup>60</sup> See Roland Murphy, “A Consideration of the Classification ‘Wisdom Psalms,’” in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom* (LBS; ed.; Norman Whybray, *Reading the Psalms as a Book* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 60-73 and Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 383.

<sup>61</sup> Bazak, “Numerical Devices,” 336.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> See further Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT*, 2:1295-96 and 2:1262-63.

to other wordplays in this psalm, this phrase plays on two levels—repetition of sound (auditory) and repetition of two out of three consonants (visual).

Semantically the terms also are involved in wordplay. In the Psalter, usually one or the other of these two synonymous terms is found – but not both of them (see Pss 9:6, 17; 10:2-4, 13; 15:3; 28:3; 35:12; 37:10, 12, 19, 21, 32, 35; 39:2; 41:2, 8; 84:11; 109:2; 140:5, 9 etc). If they do appear together in the Psalter, they appear in parallel lines and are thus used synonymously (see Pss 5:5; 10:15). Psalm 34:22 is apparently the only other instance in Book I of the Psalter in which these two terms appear in the same verse. But in v. 22 the psalmist displays an ingenious use of personification of the term רעה just as was done by the writer of Ps 5:5. In Ps 34:22, “evil” is personified and made the subject of the verb תמותה, the opening word of the psalm’s *Tav* line: “Evil will deliver the death blow<sup>64</sup> to the wicked.”

One additional aspect of this wordplay in v. 22 should be noted. The theme of Yahweh’s protection and deliverance of the afflicted righteous person is a major motif in this psalm. Explicit expressions of this theme are seen in vv. 5-11, 16, 19-21 and 23. But it is not so with the wicked. Verse 22 is an occurrence of the use of both irony and sarcasm to contrast the fate of the wicked with the theme of the deliverance of the righteous. First, v. 22a is ironic in that the statement is unexpected. Based upon the

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<sup>64</sup> On the translation of the polel imperfect as “deliver the death blow,” see Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT*, 1:562. They actually suggest “slay” specifically for this verse but see also (on the stative meaning of the Piel/Polel conjugations): Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 42-43: “The Piel frequently expresses the bringing about of a state. Thus the Piel focuses on causation and the outcome of the action. . . The foregrounded interest is not the event that happens to the subject, but rather the condition attained by it.”

common usages of these two juxtaposed synonyms thus far in the Psalter, one connects “evil” and “wicked (person) together in a working relationship. That is to say, the wicked person is not opposed to evil nor is he/she opposed by evil. Instead, evil is the motivation and/or the product or work produced by the wicked person (see: 5:5-6a; 10:15; 28:3). And yet here in Ps 34:22 there is an unexpected and thus ironic twist – evil rises up to deal “the deathblow” (Ps 34:22 NJPS) to the wicked!

*Function of Irony and Satire in the Poem*

Such ironic reversal of fortunes is a common theme in a few of the Book I psalms including the first alphabetic acrostic poem in the Psalms (5:11; 7:16-17; 9:16; 10:2; cf. 37:14-15a). Psalm 34:17 affirms that the “face of YHWH is against the doers of evil [רע] to cut off their memory from the land” and then v. 22 comes along and ironically affirms that such persons will be undone by their own evil devices.

Second, such a statement by the psalmist is an instance of sarcasm directed toward the doers of evil (v. 17: בעשי רע), against the wicked (v. 22: רשע), because the poet satirically *contrasts* their fate with that of the righteous. This contrast is seen in a comparison of the ending verses of the psalm, verses 18-23. Here one finds statements such as: “[YHWH] saves them from all their troubles”; “he delivers those crushed in spirit”; “YHWH will save him . . .” and “YHWH redeems the life of his servants”—all said of the righteous person(s). In the midst of all this positive and hopeful speech, the psalmist satirically says to the wicked person: “You are dead and what’s more, your assailant is evil itself.”

What is the effect of such sarcastic language upon the auditor/reader of this song?

Satire is a way of heaping scorn upon one's enemy and in a song, a way of enjoining others to heap scorn upon the wicked enemy.<sup>65</sup> The fact that the writer of Ps 34 scorns the wicked is seen in v. 17. The use of satire by the psalmists is an additional connection between the prophetic literature and the Psalter, for the prophets make constant use of satire.<sup>66</sup>

Finally, an intriguing inter-textual possibility appears in Ps 34 involving the superscription and vv. 2-3, 6, and 9. This inter-textual connection needs to be explored before moving on to a translation of the poem. In Ps 34:1 there is an historical reference to an event from the story of David as told in 1 Sam 21:11-16. This historical reference in the poem's superscription has often been the subject of discussion by commentators.

S. Terrien sums up the consensus of many when he asserts:

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<sup>65</sup> Ze'ev Weisman, *Political Satire in the Bible* (SBLSem 32; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1998), 3, 7-8 (cf. 55-100), and Thomas Jemielity, *Satire and the Hebrew Prophets* (LCBI; Louisville, Kent.: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 24-26.

<sup>66</sup> Mowinckel calls attention to songs that serve as "political lampoons" such as Isa 14:4-21 in his *Psalms*, 2:107. On the connections between Hebrew psalmody and prophecy, see W. H. Bellinger, Jr., *Psalms and Prophecy* (JSOTSup 27; Sheffield, England: Almond, 1984), 83-87; Collins, "Decoding the Psalms," 56 and Raymond J. Tournay, *Voir et entendre Dieu avec les Psaumes, ou, La liturgie prophétique du Second Temple à Jérusalem* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1988), 13-15, 183. The latter writes: "C'est la seconde composante *prophético-messianique* qui domine dans tout le reste du psautier. . . Plusieurs monographies ont traité de ce sujet, comme celle de P. Bonnard, «*Le psautier selon Jérémie*» . . . et l'article récent de W.H. Bellinger, «*Psalms and Prophecy*» . . . Mais on voyait seulement dans ces «*oracles*» et ces «*théophanies*» de simples procédés littéraires, des exercices de style anthologique . . . , et rien de plus" (13) ("It is the second element, the *prophetic-messianic*, that dominates the remainder of the Psalter. . . Several monographs have dealt with this topic, like the one by P. Bonnard, "The Psalter according to Jeremiah" . . . and the recent article by W. H. Bellinger, "Psalms and Prophecy" . . . But these (authors) see in these "oracles" and these "theophanies" only simple literary devices, examples of an anthological style . . . , and nothing more") [my translation].

At a particular stage in the collecting of the psalms, during the Persian period, a scribe who was eager to relate hymns and laments to the life of David discovered affinities between the unusual advice “taste [טעם] and see that the LORD is good” (v. 9) and “[his] good taste” or “[his] common sense” [טעם] (1 Sam 21:14).<sup>67</sup>

There is definitely some kind of intertextual allusion occurring here in Ps 34 and it also involves at least one other root—תהלהלל (v. 3; compare 1 Sam 21:14, ויתהלל).<sup>68</sup>

#### *Additional Inter-textual Links*

One additional possible inter-textual connection involves Ps 34:6, “they look to him and they shine with joy and their faces are never shamed.” This connection is not so much literary or semantic, as are the first two examples in vv. 1, 3, and 9, but rather thematic. The reference to “shine” and “face” constitutes a possible inter-textual thematic connection with a line from another 1 Samuel narrative—1 Sam 14:27. There is not in these verses a repetition of identical word roots, as with טעם and with הלל.

There is, however, a similarity between the Ps 34:6 root פנה and the 1 Sam 14:27 root פה. Furthermore, there is a semantic connection between two synonymous verbs in these canonical texts: נהר and אור, both meaning “to shine” or “to light up.” The title of Ps 34, with its reference to the great Philistine city of Gath, makes this allusion noteworthy because of the role of the Philistines in the 1 Sam 14 narrative. Granted, the 1 Samuel story is not about David but it is about Jonathan, a very close friend and confidant of David. In fact, the 1 Sam 21 story about David’s flight to the Philistines in Gath begins

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<sup>67</sup> Terrien, *Psalms*, 303-4. See also Brevard S. Childs, “Psalm Titles and Midrashic Exegesis” *JSS* 16 (1971): 144.

<sup>68</sup> Terrien, *Psalms*, 304.

with reference to his send off by Jonathan (1 Sam 20:42-21:1). Psalm 34:1 also contains an allusion to the Philistines in the time of David with its reference to the city of Gath.

Brevard Childs discusses the significance of such literary allusions in his famous article arguing for midrashic tendencies in the canonical text itself.<sup>69</sup> He argues that such inter-textual allusions are not intended merely to provide historical information connected with the poem. Instead, he argues, the main point is “literary continuity.”<sup>70</sup> This literary or thematic connectedness was based not upon a desire to nail down or restrict the poem to the “historical” life of David, but rather to highlight “general parallels between the situation described in the Psalm and some incident in the life of David.”<sup>71</sup> But Childs proceeds unnecessarily to deprecate the wordplays and linguistic parallels as “too mechanical” and “of secondary importance.”<sup>72</sup> Actually, this psalm, in which Yahweh’s sustenance and deliverance are a major motif (Ps 34:5-11, 16-21, 23), creatively uses these subtle linguistic, semantic, and thematic allusions to expound the meaning and the experience of the poem. This psalm creates the possibility of richer readings (and auditions) of the poem by the use of inter-textual allusions to two amazing instances of Yahweh’s sustenance in the story of ancient Israel’s faith—specifically, two events from

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<sup>69</sup> Childs, “Psalm Titles,” 137-50.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 147. See also more recent comment by Steven L. McKenzie, *King David: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 40: “. . . fourteen psalms contain headings referring to events in David’s life . . . It was the general content of these psalms that led a later editor to associate them with David.”

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 144, 148.

the time of David.<sup>73</sup> Once again the psalmist evidences an artistic skill in making such literary inter-textual connections. Childs even concedes that the parallels with 1 Samuel “may well reflect a careful study of the book of Samuel with an eye to such allusions.”<sup>74</sup>

### *Summary*

This chapter has discussed the several literary and poetic devices found in Ps 34. The psalm displays creative use of repetition and parallelism, both grammatical and semantical, in its bid to capture the imagination of readers and auditors. Some of these poetic devices function on an aural level while others function on both an aural and a visual level. Some of the poetic devices perform double duty—tying together semantically related lines and/or equating terms that outside of the world of the poem would be considered to be antonymous while at the same time functioning to tie together the entire poem as a literary entity. All of the poetic components serve to enrich the psalm.

I wholeheartedly agree with Girard’s assessment that Ps 34 is a work of art on a structural level. It is also, however, a work of art on the grammatical, phonemical, and semantical levels. At the conclusion of this study, it will be necessary to return to Ps 34 and to examine more closely its relationship to Ps 25 at the center of the four Book I alphabetic acrostic poems.

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<sup>73</sup> Compare Simon J. DeVries interesting comments on the literary power of narrative in comparison to ritualistic praise and literature in his *I Kings* (WBC 12; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), xxxvii-xxxviii.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

*Translation*

1: Of David when he altered his behavior<sup>75</sup> in the presence of Abimelech and he drove him out and he left.

2: **I want to bless**<sup>76</sup> Yahweh at all times, continually his celebration is in my mouth!

3: In Yahweh my soul celebrates; the humbled ones<sup>77</sup> hear and heartily rejoice<sup>78</sup>

4: Magnify Yahweh with me! Let us raise up his name together!

5: I made supplication<sup>79</sup> to Yahweh and he answered me<sup>80</sup> and from all of my terrors he delivered me.

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<sup>75</sup> Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT*, 2:1598. There is an obvious inter-textual allusion to 1 Sam 21:14.

<sup>76</sup> Bold print is used here to emphasize the force of the cohortative form of the verb. See also Joüon, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 1:125 (sec. 40b) and 2:374 (sec. 114b).

<sup>77</sup> Underlining is used here in vv. 2-3 to emphasize linguistic connections between these Hebrew morphemes as discussed earlier in this chapter on Ps 34.

<sup>78</sup> “Heartily rejoice” offered as a translation for שמח in an attempt to capture the sound play between שמעו and ושמחו. On the meaning and use of שמח, see Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT*, 2:1334 (especially, meaning number 2). Other Book I occurrences include: 16:9; 19:9; 33:21 (see also: 31:8; 32:11 and 40:17). See also E. Ruprecht, “שמח,” in *TLOT*, 3:1273-74: “As a rule, *śmh* . . . [refers] to joy expressed spontaneously . . . It is primarily the festive joy at profane and religious feasts. It is expressed in leaps of joy . . . foot stamping and hand clapping . . . dance, music, and cries of joy.”

<sup>79</sup> Compare Exod 18:15. See Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT*, 1:233 (meaning number 7).

<sup>80</sup> “And he answered me” (Hebrew: ועני). Note the sound patterning between ענוים (v. 3), ועני (v. 5) and עני (v. 7). This repetition of sounds, both consonantal and vocalic phonemes, serves to tie together vv. 3-7 in which the movement is from communal to individual praise of Yahweh. One of the hallmarks of this poem is that its praise for deity alternates between communal and individual subjects: vv. 2-3a (individual praise); vv. 3b-4 (community praise); v. 5 (individual deliverance); v. 6 (community deliverance); v. 7 (individual deliverance); v. 8 (community deliverance); vv. 9-11 (community praise).

6: They look to him and they shine with joy<sup>81</sup> and their faces are never<sup>82</sup> shamed.

7: This *humbled one*<sup>83</sup> called out and Yahweh heard, and from all his distresses he saves him.

8: The angel of Yahweh encamps around those who fear<sup>84</sup> him and he delivers them.

9: Taste and see that Yahweh is good! Blessed is the young man<sup>85</sup> who seeks refuge in him.

10: Fear Yahweh, his holy ones for there is no poverty<sup>86</sup> in store for those who fear him.

11: Young lions<sup>87</sup> are impoverished<sup>88</sup> and hungry but those who seek Yahweh have no shortage of any good thing.

<sup>81</sup> Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT*, 1:676.

<sup>82</sup> E. Kautzsch, ed. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (2d ed.; rev. A. E. Cowley; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 322 (sec. 109e): “אֶל־ with the jussive (or imperf., cf. 107p) is used sometimes to express the conviction that something cannot or should not happen . . . [Pss] 34:6; 41:3; 50:3; 121:3 . . .”

<sup>83</sup> The underlining and italics are used here to highlight the connection with “humbled ones” in v. 3.

<sup>84</sup> The boldface print is used here and in vv. 10 and 12 to call attention to the repetition of this keyword in this poem.

<sup>85</sup> Hebrew: **גִּבּוֹר**, translated “young man” here to maintain the poet’s connection between v. 9 and vv. 11 (“young lions”), 12 (“sons”). Compare Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT* 1:175.

<sup>86</sup> This translation of **מַחְסוֹר** is an attempt to highlight the semantic and thematic connection between v. 10 and v. 11 discussed above (p. 11 of this chapter). Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm list “poverty” as a viable translation of this Hebrew term (*HALOT*, 1:571).

<sup>87</sup> See J. J. M. Roberts, “The Young Lions of Psalm 34:11,” *Bib* 54 (1973): 267, who argues against emending the Masoretic text.

<sup>88</sup> Underscoring is used to emphasize the semantic parallel between **מַחְסוֹר** (v. 10) and **רָשׁוּ** (v. 11). These verses are further connected via the repetition of the root **חסר**.

12: Come, O sons, listen to me! The fear of Yahweh I will teach you.

13: Who is the man who takes delight in living?, (Who is the man) who loves<sup>89</sup> years<sup>90</sup> so that he might see good?

14: Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit!

15: Turn from evil and do good! Seek peace and pursue it!

16: The eyes of Yahweh are upon<sup>91</sup> the righteous ones and his ears (attentive) to their cry.

17: The face of Yahweh is against those who do evil in order to cut off their memory from the land.<sup>92</sup>

18: They cried out for help and Yahweh heard<sup>93</sup> and from all his distresses he delivered them.

19: Yahweh is near to those who have a shattered<sup>94</sup> heart and the crushed in spirit he saves.

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<sup>89</sup> The underscoring and bolding of several initial consonants in this verse is an attempt to call attention to the consonance discussed earlier in this chapter (pp. 19-20 above).

<sup>90</sup> On the Hebrew **יָוִם** translated as “years” see Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT*, 1:400-401. This translation is also adopted by the NJPS translation (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999).

<sup>91</sup> On the issue of the frequent use of **אֵל** for **עַל** in the Masoretic Text, see Joüon, *Grammar*, 2:485-86 (sec. 133b and 133b, (1)).

<sup>92</sup> I translate **אֶרֶץ** here as “land” just as was done in my translation of Ps 25:13 because of the earlier discussed many connections between these two poems, both structural and semantic connections.

<sup>93</sup> Note the structural, grammatical, and semantic parallels between v. 18 and v. 7 as discussed earlier in this chapter (pp. 4-5 above).

<sup>94</sup> The Hebrew term can be translated “shattered” (Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT*, 2:1403). The term occurs again in v. 21 where the subject is not **לֵב** (“heart”) but is **עֲצָמוֹת** (“bones”).

20: **Many are the miseries**<sup>95</sup> of the righteous and from all of them Yahweh delivers him.

21: He keeps<sup>96</sup> all his bones, not one of them will be shattered.

22: Evil will kill the wicked and the ones who hate the righteous shall suffer ruin.

23: Yahweh ransoms<sup>97</sup> the soul<sup>98</sup> of his servants and none of those who seek refuge in him shall suffer ruin.

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<sup>95</sup> Bold typeface is used here to highlight the sound play involved in the two consecutive terms רעות and רבות .

<sup>96</sup> The participle is שמר. S. R. Driver points out that the classical Hebrew participle “may be represented by the English ‘present’ in three separate cases . . . 3. when it denotes a general truth (Ps 37:12, 21, 26). This last usage is a mark of the later period of the language . . . Ps 34:8, 21, 23 . . .” in his *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew and Some Other Syntactical Questions* (BRS; 3d ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1892; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 167-68 (sec. 135.2).

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> The poem first used “soul” in v. 3 to focus attention upon the psalmist’s unreserved praise of Yahweh. Now, having alternated throughout the poem between focusing on individual praise and communal praise (and faith) the poet comes full circle with the mentioning of the “soul of (Yahweh’s) servants.”

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Psalm 37

#### *Introduction*

In the previous chapters, this study has proceeded to identify wordplays and plays on sound and other significant literary and artistic devices within the poem *first*, moving on thereafter to connections with other acrostic psalms in Book I. This chapter, however, begins with a lengthy discussion of the many connections between Ps 37 and its structurally parallel psalm—Ps 9/10.<sup>1</sup> This alternate strategy is followed because of the striking number of linguistic connections between these two Book I acrostic poems. Robert Alter observes that the density of connections and allusions between biblical literary texts should not be surprising:

Allusion to antecedent literary texts is an indispensable mechanism of all literature, virtually dictated by the self-recapitulative logic of literary expression. No one writes a poem or a story without some awareness of other poems or stories to emulate, pay homage to, vie with, criticize, or parody, and so the evocation of phrases, images, motifs, situations from antecedent texts is an essential part of the business of making new texts.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David N. Freedman, *Psalm 119: The Exaltation of Torah* (with Jeffrey C. Geoghegan and Andrew Welch; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 2: “. . . Psalms 25 and 34 have a bicolon [2 cola] for each letter [of the alphabet], and Psalms 9/10 and 37 have a tetracolon (4 cola) with each letter.” See also 13, 22-23.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Alter, *The World of Biblical Literature* (New York: Basic, 1992), 110. This is one area in which Alter evidences Jakobsonian influence in seeing the fluidity between diachronic and synchronic approaches. In other words, the past (traditional vocabulary, forms, structures, etc) co-exists with the present (new forms, structures, etc.). See also, Alter, *World*, 108. Cf. Yury Lotman, *Analysis of the Poetic Text* (ed. and trans. D. Barton Johnson; Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1976), 20: “The languages of the world’s peoples are not passive factors in the formation of culture. . . languages themselves are products of a complex multi-century process;” and Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, trans. Ronald Vroon (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1977), 18. On the related theological

*Inter-textual Links to Ps 9/10*

One would expect connections between Pss 37 and 34 since they share mutual affinities with ancient Israelite wisdom ideology and language. But it is in fact the linguistic affinities between Ps 9/10 and Ps 37 that are most intriguing. The connections between Ps 37 and Ps 34 and the intra-connectedness of lines in Ps 37 are indeed significant and important for “how” the poem means,<sup>3</sup> and will be explored in due time. But since Ps 37 is the last of the four alphabetic acrostics in Book I and since it is the acrostic that is structurally parallel to the first acrostic in Book I, it seems fitting to begin here with the semantic, linguistic, grammatical, and sound parallels between these two “bookend” psalms among the Book I acrostics. In fact, this structural and thematic function of Ps 9/10 and Ps 37 can be compared to the “bookending” function of the four acrostics in Book I counterbalanced by the four acrostics in Book V.<sup>4</sup>

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issue of the co-existence of old and new as evidence of “shared consciousness,” see Ellen F. Davis, “Critical Traditioning: Seeking an Inner Biblical Hermeneutic,” in *The Art of Reading Scripture* (ed. E. F. Davis and Richard B. Hays; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 168-69.

<sup>3</sup> Compare Wolfgang Iser, *The Art of Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1978), 20-21, 24 and *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1989), 5. Lotman (*Structure of the Artistic*) follows Iser’s contention that polyvalence is characteristic of artistic texts thus justifying the focus on how a text means rather than the focus on the “correct” interpretation. He writes: “An artistic model is always broader and has greater vitality than any interpretation attributed to it . . . when we recode an artistic system into a non-artistic language, we are always left with an ‘untranslated’ remainder, that ‘supra-information’ which is possible only in an artistic text” (68).

<sup>4</sup> Compare Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985; reprint/paperback, 1987), 537: “It is interesting that Books I and V each contain four acrostic psalms, while there are none in the intervening

The first connection between Ps 37 and Ps 9/10 is found in 37:3, 9, 11 and 10:16, 18. This linguistic connection involves the root ארץ (“land”). This root occurs three more times in Ps 37 and thus functions as a keyword in the poem (see vv. 22, 29, 34). Note that the several occurrences are spread throughout the entirety of Ps 37. The ideology of the land and of its legitimate dwellers is certainly significant to the theology of Ps 37 and will be discussed later in this chapter. The focus now is upon this linguistic connection with Ps 9/10—specifically 10:16.

There is an interesting set of parallels in the following bi-cola from Pss 9/10 and 37 as can be seen in the following table.

TABLE 10

## PARALLEL STATEMENTS IN PSS 9/10 AND 37 REGARDING THE LAND

Verse	Land Statement
37:9b:	וקוי יהוה המה יירשו־ארץ . . . (“ . . .but the ones who wait for YHWH, they <sup>5</sup> will inherit the land”)
37:11a:	וענוים יירשו־ארץ . . . . . (“but the afflicted will inherit the land”)
10:16b:	אבדו גוים מארצו . . . . . (“ . . . the nations have been destroyed from his land”)

divisions. This [literary phenomenon] may indicate that the final redactor consciously provided the early acrostics with balancing counterparts toward the end of the anthology” (page citation is to the paperback edition).

<sup>5</sup> On the emphatic use of the personal pronoun used here (המה), see Paul Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (trans. and rev. T. Muraoka; 2 vols.; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1996): “Since a finite verbal form in itself indicates the

Both of these structurally-parallel poems call attention to the theologically important theme of the land. But whereas the (wicked) nations are destroyed “from the land” in Ps 10, the ones who depend upon Yahweh in Ps 37 will inherit the land—in other words, inhabit the land vacated by the wicked.

It is interesting that the term that appears in 10:16, **אבד** (“to perish, be destroyed”), is repeated in Ps 37:20. This term is a keyword in Ps 9/10 as is evidenced by the following references: 9:4, 6, 7, 19 and, of course, 10:16. In Ps 9/10 the wicked enemies of the psalmist perish from Yahweh’s land and their cities are utter ruins (9:6, 7; 10:16, 18b). The other side of the coin is more prominent in Ps 37. In contrast, here the emphasis is more upon the *results* of the destruction (**אבד**) merely heralded in Ps 9/10—the righteous servants of Yahweh will inherit the land vacated by the destruction of the wicked nations (Ps 37:9, 11, 22, 29, 34).

An additional linguistic connection occurs in 9:10; 10:1 and 37:39 and involves the phrase: “in time(s) of trouble” (**בעת צרה / לעתות בצרה**). Reading these two poems as “bookends” to the four Book I alphabetic acrostics, it is noteworthy that there is an A:B:A pattern to the repetition of this phrase regarding troubled times. In this patterned repetition, Yahweh is first present and protective during difficult times (9:10); but then absent or hidden during troubled times (10:1); and then again present and protective (37:39b):

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person, it can be said that, whenever a verb occurs with a pronoun, some nuance is intended. Generally speaking, the addition of a pronoun gives some special prominence to the person or persons indicated by it, comparable to the close-up focus in photography . . . the pronoun is [sometimes] added to bring out antithetical contrast” (2:538, sec. 146a).

9:10: “YHWH is a refuge . . . in *times of trouble*” A

10:1: “YHWH . . . distant . . . hidden in *times of trouble*” B

37:39b: “YHWH their stronghold in *time of trouble*” A'

Such a reading, portraying Yahweh as on again, off again, may seem offensive to some modern readers of these poems but apparently not to the ancient readers. Such apparent vacillation literarily parallels the vacillation and doubt expressed in many of the Book I laments. Brueggemann and Gottwald label this phenomenon disorientation and reorientation.<sup>6</sup> The best known examples of this theme in Book I are found in Pss 9:1-7 :: 9:19-21<sup>7</sup>; 13:2-3 :: 13:6<sup>8</sup>; 22:2-3, 12-15, 20 :: 22:25-26; 25:8-10 :: 25:16-19; 27:9 :: 27:14; 35:17, 22<sup>9</sup> :: 35:28; 39:8 :: 39:14.

Another interesting inter-textual connection appears in 37:6b and 9:5a and consists in the repetition of the word **משפט**. In Ps 9 the poet boasts that Yahweh upholds his “just cause” and then the poet in Ps 37 claims a similar blessing upon those being encouraged to trust in Yahweh. What makes this repetition interesting is that: (1) although not appearing in the same acrostic line, both of these occurrences appear early on in their respective psalms, and (2) this nuance of this term, “just cause” or “just case,” is rare in Book I of the Psalter, apparently occurring in only two other psalms (Pss 17:2 and 35:23).

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<sup>6</sup> See Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms and the Life of Faith* (ed. Patrick D. Miller; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 7-9; 9, n. 20; 11-15; 22 and Gottwald, *Hebrew Bible*, 538.

<sup>7</sup> Note the two very different contexts of the occurrence of **דבא** in vv. 6-7 and v. 19.

<sup>8</sup> Note the two contrasting uses of “heart” (**לב**) in v. 3b and v. 6b.

<sup>9</sup> Note in v. 22a, the root “to be distant, aloof” (**רחק**). Compare 10:1.

An interesting inter-textual connection also appears in comparing Ps 37:14-15 with several verses in Ps 9/10. Thematically the concept of the wicked enemies drawing their swords to butcher (Hebrew, טבח) the upright—only to be pierced through by their own swords—echoes a similar sentiment in Ps 9/10 (compare Pss 37:14-15 with 9:16). This theme of ironic divine reversal also appears in two additional Book I psalms—Pss 7:16-17 and 5:11. There is also, however, a linguistic connector between Pss 37:15 and Ps 10. The phrase “in his/their heart” (בלבו/בלבם) is repeated sarcastically in 37:15, echoing its appearance in Ps 10:6, 11, and 13. In the latter poem, the wicked man says things “in his heart” that are patently false and which are threatening towards the righteous afflicted. Then in Ps 37 the wicked persons’ swords, meant for the demise of the humble, pierce “into their (own) heart” (v. 15).

There are three striking linguistic links between Pss 37:17 and 10:15. This inter-textual connection involves the repetition of the following roots: שבר רשע and זרועות / זרוע. The linguistic linkages between these two verses in these two structurally parallel psalms function to highlight the similar themes of the wicked plotting and acting against the righteous, only to be defeated by Yahweh (compare Ps 10:9-15 with Ps 37:14-17).

Another linguistic connection between Pss 37 and 9/10 appears in connection with the root מצא (37:36b; 10:15b). In both poems it is the wicked enemy who will “not be found.” Interestingly, these two verses apparently represent the only occurrences of this root in the Book I acrostic psalms.

*Various Artistic Components within Ps 37*

It is now appropriate to turn attention to the poetic devices, repetitions, linguistic markers, and wordplays in Ps 37 itself. First, vv. 1-2 contain an interesting play on sound in connection with the two terms: **חָרָה** and **מָהָר**. These two roots, “to become angry/enraged”<sup>10</sup> and “to hasten,”<sup>11</sup> respectively, could not be further apart semantically. Nevertheless, in the context of vv. 1-2 their play on sound highlights the sarcasm built into their separate semantic meanings: “don’t be *annoyed* by wicked men for they will *soon* wither like grass”. This sound wordplay is, of course, impossible to reproduce in English translation. The righteous person should not be concerning himself or herself with the wicked ones because they will soon be gone, out of existence and thus no more trouble.

Ridderbos long ago pointed out that vv. 1-4 provide a powerful opening for this poem. He likens these verses to a bud which contains the main thoughts or themes of the entire psalm.<sup>12</sup> This observation certainly holds true with respect to the sarcasm found in

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<sup>10</sup> Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT*, 1:351 and G. Sauer, “**חָרָה**,” in *TLOT* 2:473.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:553-4.

<sup>12</sup> N. H. Ridderbos, *Die Psalmen: Stilistische Verfahren und Aufbau mit besonderer Berücksichtigung von Ps 1-41* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1972), 271-2: “V. 1-4 bilden einen kraftvollen Beginn des Psalms. Sie geben die Hauptgedanken dieses Teils – wir können auch wohl sagen: des ganzen Psalms – . . . in den ersten Versen is der gesamte Psalm wie in einer Knospe enthalten . . .” (“VV. 1-4 form a powerful beginning for the psalm. They give the main ideas of this section – we could also probably say: of the entire psalm -- . . . in the first verses is the whole psalm, contained as in a bud.”) [my translation].

vv. 1-2, for this poem does display other instances of sarcasm or satire.<sup>13</sup> See for example vv. 10, 12-13, 14-15, 26b compared with 28c, and 35-36. Furthermore, vv. 3-4 are closely connected by a preponderance of imperative forms. There are five imperatives in these verses and although there are imperatival forms in the rest of this poem as well, these five in vv. 3-4a are tied together by means of an inclusio-type pattern. As noted by P. Auffret, both the first and the last of these imperatives are “complemented” by the object YHWH.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, this repetition of YHWH in the first and last imperatival phrase functions to connect the imperatives of vv. 3-4 and thus contributes to the overall symmetry and unity of vv. 1-4.

In Ps 37:8b-9a, there is an example of the rhetorical device known as *anadiplosis*—a form of repetition that functions to bring dramatic effect to the line.<sup>15</sup> The root **עָרַב** ends the last line of v. 8b and begins the first line of v. 9a. This rhetorical device thus functions to continue the thought of v. 8—to provide, as it were, the consequences or results of being led to “evil” (**עָרַב**) by one’s wrath. Such repetition is not redundant but serves a structural connective function, tying together these two lines and expressing the

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<sup>13</sup> Ze’ev Weisman, *Political Satire in the Bible* (SBLSem 32; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1998), 3-4, 7-8.

<sup>14</sup> Pierre Auffret, *Que Seulement de tes Yeux tu Regardes . . . : Etude Structurale de trieze psaumes* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 134. See J. P. Fokkelman, *The Psalms in Form: The Hebrew Psalter in its Poetic Shape* (Leiden: Deo Publishing, 2002). Fokkelman, in his visual display of the poetic structure of Ps 37, designates vv. 3-4 as a unit, making up strophe II (48).

<sup>15</sup> See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic, 1985), 64. Alter deals with this device under the broader umbrella of anaphora, “the rhetorically emphatic reiteration of a single word or brief phrase . . .” (64). He goes on to point out that this device is not just a matter of simple duplication but the second occurrence effects a “heightening,” an increased note of urgency or intensity (64-65). See also Lotman, *Structure of the Artistic*, 131-32.

consequences of the behavior censored in v. 8b. To paraphrase, these lines state: “anger and wrath only lead to *evildoing*; *evildoers* will certainly<sup>16</sup> be cut off (exterminated)!”

The repetition and resultant wordplay and sound play between the forms **הרע** (v. 8b) and **מרעים** (v. 9a) underscores this message. Ridderbos comments on the close connection *thematically* between vv. 8b and 9a but does not call attention to the sound play involved in the repeated Hebrew root.<sup>17</sup>

The fact that these two verses are closely tied structurally is seen also in the sound play between two other terms: **המה** (v. 8) and **המה** (v. 9). These two terms are semantically distinct, or as Lotman would say, semantically “mutually isolated.”<sup>18</sup> And yet, their visual and auditory similarity functions to tie these two verses together even closer within the world of this poem.

One additional comment on **המה** and **המה** should be noted. Attentiveness to the sound play involved provides an alternative reading of the significance of the grammatically superfluous use of the third person personal pronoun in v. 9b which is translated “. . . the ones who wait on YHWH, they will inherit the land.” The traditional

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<sup>16</sup> Reading the Hebrew particle **כִּי** as a demonstrative particle rather than a conjunction. See Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT*, 1:470 (meaning A.1). Compare Pss 8:5; 9:19; 10:14; 16:8; 22:10, 17; 25:6; 27:5; 31:13; 36:10; 44:23a; and 141:8a (cf. Pss 49:16b, 118:10b).

<sup>17</sup> Ridderbos, *Die Psalmen*, 272: “Die Schlussworte von v. 8, ‘es führt nur zum Übeltun’ verleihen den Warnungen vor Zorn . . . einen schweren Akzent; es besteht die Gefahr, dass man wird wie die Übeltäter, und diese, so fährt v. 9a fort, werden ausgerottet” (“The final message of v. 8, ‘It only leads to evildoing’ gives the warnings about anger . . . a heavy emphasis; the danger exists that one would become like the evildoers, and in this way, as v. 9a continues, be wiped out”) [my translation].

<sup>18</sup> Lotman, *Structure of the Artistic*, 170.

grammatical explanation is that the added third person personal pronoun here gives special prominence to the persons thereby referred to.<sup>19</sup> An additional possibility, however, is that the occurrence of **המה** in v. 9 structurally “balances” or “mirrors” the occurrence of **המה** in v. 8a and contributes to the connection between the two semantically related verses. It is also interesting in this regard that these two terms appear in relatively the same position in their cola. Both terms are the fourth/fifth word from the beginning of their respective lines.

Verse 13a is interesting in its shift from the use of the name YHWH, consistently used in this psalm for deity, to the term **אדני**. Why does the poet change his terms here? Perhaps the explanation is to be found in the sound play between the final long *-ay* sounds at the end of **אדני** and at the end of v. 12b—the term **שניו**. T. McCreech has emphasized the important role that repeated final sounds play in biblical poetry.<sup>20</sup> This sound repetition functions to cement the contrastive imagery in vv. 12b and 13a. Whereas the wicked person shows his teeth in “gnashing” (**חרק**)<sup>21</sup> them against the righteous person, in the very next line (v. 13a) **אדני** shows his teeth, if you will, in “laughing” (**שחק**) at the doomed wicked plotter. Whether intended by the poet or not, it should also be noted that in addition to the sound play between the endings of **שניו** and **אדני**, two of the three consonants are shared by the Hebrew terms for *gnash* and *laugh*.

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<sup>19</sup> Joüon, *Grammar*, 2:538 (sec. 146a).

<sup>20</sup> Thomas P. McCreech. *Biblical Sound and Sense: Poetic Sound Patterns in Proverbs 10-29* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 17-22, 53.

<sup>21</sup> See also Ps 35:16.

This repetition may indeed be considered coincidental, but the effect is the same regardless of the poet's intentions. The similarities in sound function to strengthen the connection between vv. 12 and 13 and thus underscore the contrast envisioned by the semantic meanings of the words.

There is an interesting play on words in Ps 37:11b and 21a. This wordplay involves the Hebrew root: שלם. This root carries two distinct denotations in this poem, and the distinction in semantic meanings makes possible the sarcastic play on words involved in the second occurrence. In v. 11b the poem says the afflicted, in contrast to the wicked, will inherit the land and will take delight in “an abundance of well-being” (שלום על־רב). Also in v. 37, the righteous person is described as a “man of peace (שלום).”

The second meaning of the root שלם is “to pay a debt, repay.”<sup>22</sup> There is, however, in this last occurrence the negation of the root שלם —that is, “does not repay.” The play on words involves both sight and sound for when one reads (or hears) the v. 21 phrase, ולא ישלם. After reading or hearing על־רב שלום earlier in the poem, the phrase “no repayment” or “no *shlm*” in connection with the wicked enemies is striking because the occurrence of the morpheme *shlm* in v. 21 cannot help but conjure up the other, previously used denotation of “peace” and thus here the thought “no peace” when one encounters the phrase ולא ישלם. This play on the *shlm* root adds an ironic twist (linguistically) to the already ironic reversal of fortunes envisioned in vv. 9-11 and vv.

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<sup>22</sup> Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm, eds., *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Study ed.; trans. and ed. M. E. J. Richardson; 2 vols.; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001), 2:1534 (sec. 1a).

21-22. The root **זרע** occurs a total of four times with two distinct denotations (vv. 17, 25, 26, and 28). The first occurrence of the tri-literal root in v. 17 appears in the form **זרוע**<sup>23</sup> and refers literally to one's "arm" or "forearm" and then metaphorically to one's "power" (force).<sup>24</sup> This meaning is, of course, the same meaning of this root as it appeared earlier in Ps 10:15. This sense is not, however, the meaning of this root in its other three occurrences in Ps 37. In vv. 25, 26, and 28 the meaning is "offspring, descendants."<sup>25</sup> There may in fact be some etymological relationship between the verbal root **זרע** ("to sow seed") and **זרעו**.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, there is an interesting contrastive play on words involving the two distinct meanings of this basic root in Ps 37:17 and 25, 26 and 28.

First, attention should be paid to the sound play<sup>27</sup> involved in the occurrences in vv. 17, 25, and 26: **זרועות** (v. 17) and **זרעו** (vv. 25, 26). This similarity in sound between the repeated vowel pointings and between the repeated tri-literal stem alerts the reader to a possible connection between these two usages that are on the surface denotatively distinct. What might be the connection between the two distinct usages? Might there be

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 1:280. Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm also list the alternate form **זרע** in the discussion in 1:280.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 1:282.

<sup>26</sup> Cyrus H. Gordon, ed., *Ugaritic Textbook* (AnOr 38; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965; rev. reprint, 1998), sec. 5.4.; cf. *BDB*, 281-84.

<sup>27</sup> Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," in *Selected Writings* (ed. Stephen Rudy; 8 vols.; The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton, 1981), 3:43.

an ironic contrast between the two denotative meanings—an irony that is being highlighted by means of a sound wordplay? Perhaps so.

In v. 17, the **זרע** root refers to the “arms” of the wicked ones which will be shattered.<sup>28</sup> The term “shatter” is extremely picturesque and concrete because it is often used of bones that are broken or shattered.<sup>29</sup> Of course, when one’s arms are broken the bones therein are shattered. And so this poem envisions the shattering of the arms of the wicked persons—the same arms that they planned to use to draw their swords and bend their bows for wicked purposes (37:14). By the power of Yahweh not only are the bows of the wicked “shattered” (v. 15, **שבר**) but also their very arms (**זרועות**) are shattered (v. 17).

#### *An Inter-textual Link with Ps 7*

When Book I of the Psalter is read as a unified book, there is also an ironic intra-textual connection between Pss 37 and 7. In Ps 7:13-14 Yahweh is depicted as a skilled and threatening warrior readying to take his vengeance upon the evil person (7:10). In contrast, in Ps 37:14-15 the wicked persons are depicted as inept would be warriors who conspire against the needy and the poor and end up bringing destruction upon themselves. Shared terminology between the two poems is as follows: **חרב** (7:13;

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<sup>28</sup> Translated “shattered” (vv. 15, 17) also by: K. C. Hanson, “Alphabetic Acrostics: A Form Critical Study” (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1984), 96. In contrast, most of the standard English translations render “broken” in both verses (KJV; ASV; NASV; RSV; NEB; NIV; NRSV). The Luther Bibel renders as “zerbrechen” (“to break, smash, shatter”) in both v. 15 and v. 17.

<sup>29</sup> Hebrew: **שבר**. See Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT*, 2:1402 (1.a).

37:14, 15); קשת (7:13; 37:14, 15); דרך (7:13; 37:14; cf. 37:23); כּוֹן (7:14; 37:23); and מוֹת (7:14; 37:32).

Additionally, these two contrastive themes are complementary: Yahweh is successful in his fight to protect his servants against wickedness while the wicked threaten Yahweh's servants but are most unsuccessful in their plans—so unsuccessful that their plans bring destruction upon themselves. If Pss 1 and 2 can be considered to be a two-fold introduction to the Psalter,<sup>30</sup> then Pss 7 and 37 also appear in Book I in equidistant places from the beginning of Book I and the ending of Book I respectively. Psalm 7 appears five psalms from the beginning (Ps 3) and Ps 37 appears five psalms from the end of Book I (Ps 41).

In marked contrast, the fate of the righteous is not a picture of defeat and despair. According to the poem, they are not abandoned and their “seed,” “offspring” (v. 25, זרע) is taken care of. In fact, they are blessed (v. 26) while in ironic contrast the “seed” (v. 28b, זרע) of the broken-armed wicked ones will be “cut off.” One should also note one additional sound play between two terms in vv. 17 and 28. The arms (זרועות) of the wicked will be *shattered* (שבר), v. 17 while the seed (זרע) of Yahweh's faithful ones is *guarded* (שמר) forever, v. 28. Notice the sound play between the two roots: שמר and

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<sup>30</sup> Gerald T. Sheppard, *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct: a study in the sapientializing of the Old Testament* (BZAW 151; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 139-44; Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50* (WBC 19; Waco: Word, 1983), 60; J. Clinton McCann, Jr., *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: The Psalms as Torah* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 41-2; James L. Mays, *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook to the Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 132; Nancy L. DeClaisse-Walford, *Reading from the Beginning: The Shaping of the Hebrew Psalter* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1997) 37-41, 54-5; and James L. Crenshaw, *The Psalms: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 4.

שבר. This sound play between two roots/terms that could not be further apart semantically—“to keep, guard” versus “to shatter, break” respectively—is yet another phonemic device that functions to underscore the poem’s contrast between the faithful righteous and the scheming wicked.

*Additional Poetic Devices in Ps 37*

There is a “multiform wordplay”<sup>31</sup> found in Ps 37:20. First, there is an example of alliteration (specifically, consonance) involving the letter כ as seen in the following phrase from the end of the verse: כִּיקַר כְּרִים כָּלֹ. This example of consonance is even more striking when one realizes that v. 20 is the כ line in this alphabetic acrostic poem. It should also be noted in this regard that not only does the bi-colon begin with a כ; it also ends with one (כָּלֹ).

This fact means that one-half of the words in this ten word long bi-colon begin with the letter כ. This artistic feature is reminiscent of the heavy alliteration in Ps 9:2-3 involving the letter א. Here in v. 20, as in Ps 9:2-3, this concatenation of successive initial letters is striking both visually and aurally. This artistic repetition of the same consonant also functions within v. 20 to focus attention on the semantic message of the line; that is, the complete destruction of wicked enemies of Yahweh. The multiple repetition of the letter כ in v. 20 is additionally interesting in light of Hanson’s observations regarding the abundance of “כ phrases” in this psalm. Hanson points out that there is an equal number

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<sup>31</sup> This descriptive phrase borrowed from R. Jakobson and L. R. Waugh, “The Spell of Speech Sounds,” in Roman Jakobson and Linda R. Waugh, *The Sound Shape of Language* (3d ed.; ed. Linda R. Waugh; Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2002), 220.

of phrases beginning with the particle כִּי that in the first half of the poem refer to the wicked while in the second half of the poem they refer to the righteous (or, those favored by Yahweh). Hanson enumerates ten total phrases—five with reference to the wicked and concentrated in vv. 2-17 and five with reference to the righteous and concentrated in vv. 22-40.<sup>32</sup> Actually, there are twelve total כִּי phrases found in these verses, but Hanson is correct that half of them refer to the wicked and half of them to the righteous. The phrases about the wicked are found in vv. 2a, 9a, 13b (two כִּי phrases), 17a, and 20a. The כִּי phrases related to the righteous are found in vv. 22a, 24a, 24b, 28a, 37b, and 40b. As Hanson points out, this repeated “sequence operates as a device between text and audience, highlighting the antagonism between the two adversarial groups.”<sup>33</sup> There is, however, more significance to the equally balanced repeated phrases. They contribute to the overall symmetry of the psalm. Also, they represent an inter-textual connection between this wisdom-influenced psalm and the wisdom-influenced psalm at the beginning of Book I—Ps 1. In Ps 1 there is also a bifurcation in the poem with one half describing the fate of the righteous and the other half the fate of the wicked.

Additionally, Ps 37:20 is an example of poetic ambiguity.<sup>34</sup> The phrase כִּיקַר כְּרִים

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<sup>32</sup> Hanson, “Alphabetic Acrostics,” 112.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. See also Ridderbos, *Die Psalmen*, 274.

<sup>34</sup> R. Jakobson concurs with others that ambiguity is inherently part of the very roots of poetry. He says, “Ambiguity is an intrinsic, inalienable character of any self-focused message, briefly, a corollary feature of poetry,” in his “Linguistics and Poetics,” in *Selected Writings*, 3:42.

is usually translated “like the glory of the pastures” or something very similar.<sup>35</sup> Some English translations, however, in their footnotes on this verse call attention to the fact that another translation is possible. In fact, the phrase כִּיקֶר כְּרִים is in fact ambiguous.

Another viable translation is “like precious lambs (for slaughter).”<sup>36</sup> The advantage of preserving and highlighting this ambiguity of language is that it expands the potential metaphors presented by the poem. Also, ambiguity is a tool of poetry to slow down the reader or hearer, to keep them from rushing through the poem and thus forcing them to focus on the poem itself. This technique of poetry is sometimes referred to as defamiliarization—making the familiar “unfamiliar” and thus increasing the length of perception time or focus on the poetry itself. This focus of language upon itself rather than upon some external referent is touted by Jakobson as the definition of “poetic function.”<sup>37</sup>

With the translation “glory of the pastures,” the picture painted is one of the drying up or coming to an end of the wicked—like pasturage which vanishes into thin air like smoke. This metaphor nicely echos the beginning of the poem (v. 2) and points forward to vv. 35-36. With the translation “like precious lambs (for slaughter),” however, v. 20 conjures up the mental image of sacrifice which is further underscored by the reference to “smoke” (עֶשֶׁן). The point here, of course, is not that the wicked are to be sacrificed to

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<sup>35</sup> See NASV; RSV; NRSV. Compare NAB; NIV; JB (ed. Fisch, 1997); NJPS.

<sup>36</sup> See Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT*, 1:496 (s.v. II. כֶּר) and J. M. Allegro, “A Newly-Discovered Fragment of a Commentary on Psalm XXXVII from Qumran,” *PEQ* LXXXVI (1954): 72. See also NEB (footnote: “like the worth of rams”); ASV (“as the fat of lambs”).

<sup>37</sup> Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics,” in *Selected Writings*, 3:69.

Yahweh but that their swift disappearance (compare v. 2a) will be like the swift disappearance of the choicest part of the lamb which is burned in sacrifice and vanishes in smoke. When one recognizes and acknowledges the ambiguity of the language in v. 20, room is allowed for both of these powerful metaphors to be recognized in a reading of v. 20.

One additional interesting device appears in v. 20a—the sound play between two juxtaposed words: “be destroyed” and “enemies.” The Hebrew terms, **יִאבְדוּ** and **וְאֵיבִי**, respectively, are distinct denotatively but here in this line they are paralleled or “mirrored” by means of their juxtaposition. The two terms, upon closer inspection, actually share not only the consonants **א** and **ב**, but also the consonants **ל** and **י**. Jakobson has argued that within the internal system of the poem morphologically similar words may be identical or close in meaning even though denotatively outside the poem they carry different meanings.<sup>38</sup> This observation would certainly appear to apply to these two morphologically-similar terms in v. 20. While these two terms translated “to be destroyed” and “enemies” are denotatively distinct outside of this poem—in other words, in the lexicon—in *this* poem they are closely connected and parallel in meaning. Interestingly, and surprisingly, this verse is the only occurrence of either one of these terms in this poem.

#### *Additional Inter-textual Links*

In reading the Psalter as a book, and in this case paying especially close attention to the eight Book I and Book V acrostics, an interesting intra-textual connection between

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<sup>38</sup> Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics,” *Selected Works*, 3:43.

Pss 37:24 and 145:14 surfaces. This connection is described as “intra-textual” since this study chooses to read the Psalter as a unified book in its final form of the five-fold books that make up the canonical Psalter.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, such a unified reading is attentive to connections between Books I and V because of their shared number of alphabetic acrostic poems (four in each book) and thereby the potential “bookending” function played by these two Books within the book of Psalms.

The linguistic connection between Ps 37:24 and Ps 145:14 involves the repetition of three Hebrew roots. This repetition also exhibits a form of chiasmic patterning in repeating these roots. This relationship can best be seen if these two phrases are set out in parallel with the three repeated terms, נפל, יהוה, and סמך identified as A, B, and C respectively :

Ps 37:24	כִּי־יִפֹּל [A] לֹא־יֹטֵל כִּי־יְהוָה [B] סוֹמֵךְ [C] יִדּוּ
Ps 145:14	סוֹמֵךְ [C'] יְהוָה [B'] לְכֹל־הַגִּפְּלִים [A']

This A B C C' B' A' patterning is all the more interesting because these two similar lines appear in relatively similar places in their respective poems—Ps 37:24 appears in the מ line of its acrostic poem and Ps 145:14 appears in the ס line<sup>40</sup> of its acrostic poem. If these two poems are looked at via the paradigm presented by J. Fokkelman, these two

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<sup>39</sup> See DeClaissé-Walford, *Reading from the Beginning*.

<sup>40</sup> One should note that Ps 145 contains no נ line and so the similar placement in these two psalms is closer than would otherwise be the case.

linguistically parallel phrases appear approximately fifty-nine/sixty percent into the body of their poems.<sup>41</sup>

Thus these two similarly repetitive lines interestingly appear in relatively the same places within two poems that already share the following characteristics: (1) Ps 37 is the last of four alphabetic acrostic poems in the first of five books in the Psalter, and (2) Ps 145 is the last of four alphabetic acrostic poems in the last of five books in the Psalter.

Psalm 37:36a is yet another potentially ambiguous phrase whose ambiguity is often erased by emendation and by translators who wish to correct the perceived uncertainty in the Masoretic Text. The phrase as it stands in the MT reads: “ויעבר והנה איננו . . .” and thus is translated, “and he passed (disappeared)<sup>42</sup> and behold, he was not.” The editors of BHS suggest emending to read “I passed by . . .” and this reading *is* supported by the LXX which translates the phrase: και παρηλθον και ιδου ουκ ην (“and I passed by and behold he was not”). In arguing in favor of emending ויעבר, the third person singular form, to the first person singular form to match the LXX, one could also point to the first person singular forms ראיתי (“I saw”) in v. 35a and ואבקשהו (“I sought him”) in v. 36b. But if one abandons the emendation in v. 36a and reads the MT’s third person singular (ויעבר), then it is possible to notice a poetic use of alternating persons in the

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<sup>41</sup> Fokkelman (*Psalms in Form*), in his display of the psalms divided into strophes, shows Ps 37:24 to belong to strophe number 13 (out of 22 strophes; 13/22 equals the 59% mark into the poem and shows Ps 145:14 as belonging to strophe number 6 (out of 10 strophes; 6/10 equals the 60% mark into the poem).

<sup>42</sup> The use of עבר in the Psalter to mean “pass away, disappear, be gone” can be seen in the following texts: Pss 57:2b; 90:4a; 144:4b; 148:6b. See also H. –P. Stähli, “עבר,” *TLOT*, 2:833, section 3. (b), and M. S. Rozenberg and B. M. Zlotowitz, *The Book of Psalms: A New Translation and Commentary* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1999), 219, 225.

grammatical forms of certain terms in vv. 35-36. Jakobson comments on the significance of such “grammatical oppositions” in his work on the grammar of poetry:

Often contrasts, affinities, and contiguities of tense and number, of verbal aspect and voice, acquire a directly leading role in the composition of particular poems. Emphasized by an opposition of grammatical category, they function like poetic images, and, for instance, a masterful alternation of grammatical categories of person becomes a means of intense dramatization.<sup>43</sup>

The resultant alternating pattern of person in vv. 35-36 is as follows:

first person singular in v. 35a:	ר א י ת י
third person singular in v. 36a:	ו י ע ב ר
first person singular in v. 36b:	ו א ב ק ש ה ו
third person singular in v. 36b:	נ מ צ א

This alternating pattern functions to highlight the divine reversal experienced by the wicked, powerful person—from riches to rags, so to speak (or from powerful existence to non-existence)—and witnessed by the poem’s speaker. This alternating pattern is itself highlighted by being bracketed on both sides by imperative forms in v. 34 (קוה) and (ושמר) and in v. 37 (וראה and שמר).

Psalms 37:40a and 40b are another example of the use of the device referred to as *anadiplosis* which was seen earlier in connection with vv. 8b and 9a.<sup>44</sup> In this case, the repetition of the root פלט in the phrase יפלטם יפלטם functions to underscore the deliverance effected by Yahweh. And as pointed out by Alter the repetition here is not redundant but rather adds to the dramatic effect and adds some additional information

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<sup>43</sup> R. Jakobson, “Poetry of Grammar,” in *Language in Literature* (ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy; Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap/Harvard, 1987), 121-22.

<sup>44</sup> Alter, *Art of Biblical Poetry*, 64.

(“. . . rescues them, rescues them *from the wicked*”).<sup>45</sup> In discussing repetition in biblical parallelism, Alter observes: “The most common pattern in this regard is one of incremental repetition: something is stated; then it is restated verbatim with an added element.”<sup>46</sup> He cites an example from Judg 5, but Ps 37:40 is another clear example.

Lotman additionally comments on this type of repetition in artistic literature. He insightfully argues:

Strictly speaking, total, unconditional repetition is impossible in poetry. The repetition of a word in a text, as a rule, does not mean the mechanical repetition of a concept. Most often it points to a more complex, albeit unified, semantic content. . . the duplication of the word does not imply the automatic duplication of the concept, but rather another new, complication of its content.<sup>47</sup>

#### *The Wicked are “Cut Off”*

L. Perdue makes an interesting observation about the repetition of the motif of the wicked being “cut off” in Ps 37 as it relates to the overall structure of the psalm. Perdue argues that Ps 37 should be classified, along with Pss 1; 19B; 34; 73; 112; and 127, as a “proverb psalm.” That is, a poem that is structurally built around a repeated (key) proverb. In the case of Ps 37, the central proverb is first expressed in v. 9: “For evil men

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. See also 10-11, 14, 19, 21; Johann G. Herder, *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* (n.p., 1782-83; trans. James Marsh Burlington, VT: Edward Smith, 1833). In rejecting the charge that Hebrew parallelism is redundant, Herder says: [Hebrew poetic parallelism] changes the figure and exhibits the thought in another light. It varies the precept, and explains it, or impresses it upon the heart” (41); and Kugel, *Idea*, 8, 12-13, 23, 42, 51-52, and 57-58.

<sup>46</sup> Alter, *Art of Biblical Poetry*, 23.

<sup>47</sup> Y. Lotman, *Structure of the Artistic*, 126-27.

will be cut off, but those who wait for Yahweh, **they** shall inherit the land.”<sup>48</sup> This basic theme (or proverb) is repeated in similar language in vv. 22, 28, 34, and 38.

What is most interesting for this study is that Perdue does not contrast the ideas of the artistic with that of the didactic. In fact, in an interesting sentence he equates these two concepts which, unfortunately in other works, are presented as mutually exclusive. Perdue writes (in reference to Ps 1, a “proverb poem”): “. . . in terms of content and structure the proverb is the locus around which the content and the structure of the highly artistic didactic poem has been built.”<sup>49</sup>

Perdue does well to note the function of this repeated theme in the structure of the poem<sup>50</sup> but a closer look yields more insights on the linguistic level. First, the repeated term “cut off” is a keyword (vv. 9, 22, 28b, 29a, 34b, 38b), especially in its frequent contrast with ירש (“inherit”). The Hebrew term translated “cut off” (כרת) is one of three very strong, graphically violent words used in this poem to describe the demise of the wicked: כרת: “to cut off, chop off (as in hands, feet, or arms), to exterminate”;<sup>51</sup> שבר,

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<sup>48</sup> See Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom and Cult: A Critical Analysis of the Views of Cult in the Wisdom Literatures of Israel and the Ancient Near East* (SBLDS 30; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1977), 281. I have bolded “they” in order to call attention to the emphatic use of the personal pronoun הֵמָּה.

<sup>49</sup> Perdue, *Wisdom and Cult*, 271. See also Crenshaw, *The Psalms: An Introduction*, 87; Jakobson, “The Dominant,” in *Language in Literature*, 43; and Lotman, *Structure of the Artistic*, 65-66. Compare and contrast, Hanson, “Alphabetic Acrostics,” 100-103.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 283-84.

<sup>51</sup> Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT*, 1:500-501 and E. Kutsch, “כרת *krt* to cut off,” in *TLOT*, 2:635-36.

vv. 15, 17: “to break in pieces, shatter”;<sup>52</sup> שִׁמַּד, v. 38: “to exterminate.”<sup>53</sup> In addition to being used parallel to שִׁמַּד in v. 38, כָּרַת is used in contrast to יָרַשׁ three times (vv. 9, 22, and 34) and in contrast to שָׁמַר one time (v. 28).

The first three occurrences of the term כָּרַת are also tied together by the fact that they all appear in bi-cola that begin with the preposition כִּי as can be seen clearly in the following table.

TABLE 11

## THREE INCREASINGLY INTENSE REPETITIONS OF THE ROOT כָּרַת

Phrases	Verses
כִּי־מַרְעִים יִכְרֹתוּן וְקוֹי יִהוּהַ הַמָּה יִרְשׁוּ־אֶרֶץ	9
כִּי מִבְּרַכְיוֹ יִרְשׁוּ אֶרֶץ וּמִקְלָלָיו יִכְרֹתוּ	22
כִּי יִהוּהַ אֶהֱבֶה מִשְׁפַּט וְלֹא־יַעֲזֹב אֶת־חֲסִידָיו לְעוֹלָם נִשְׁמְרוּ וְזָרַע רָשָׁעִים נִכְרַת	28

One might get the impression from Perdue’s comments that these restatements of this central proverb or theme are redundant. The fact is that semantically speaking there is a heightening pattern evidenced in these first three appearances of this theme. In v. 9, the wicked ones are merely cut off or exterminated; in v. 22 they are not only cut off but

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 2:1402 (1.a). Compare Ps 3:8c.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 2:1553.

the “seed” or descendants of the wicked will be cut off. This sentiment is reminiscent of a similar expectation expressed in Ps 9:6-7—an earlier acrostic poem that has structural affinities with Ps 37.

One additional wordplay involving the denotative meaning of כרת should be explored. The root מלל only appears one time<sup>54</sup> and yet, due to its semantic connection with כרת, is significant poetically. The term appears in v. 2 and is typically translated “wither”<sup>55</sup> or “fade.”<sup>56</sup> There is, however, another translation possibility—one which uncovers the connection between this root and the keyword כרת. A few English translations render מלל in v. 2: “cut down.”<sup>57</sup> This rendering certainly will work in the context of v. 2: “For like green grass they will be *cut off/down* (מלל) soon and like lush new grass they will shrivel.” Following Alter’s approach of reading poetic lines for “incipient narrativity”<sup>58</sup>, these two bi-cola are an example of what he calls “consequentiality.” That is, the second half of the poetic line expresses the consequences

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<sup>54</sup> Jakobson observes that a term can appear one time and still be structurally significant. He thus warns against simply using frequency as the criterion for determining key words or key phonemes (Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics,” in *Language in Literature*, 88). On the issue of a one time occurrence of a term being significant poetically, see Y. Lotman, *Poetic Text*, 32: “As the adage has it, ‘you can’t throw a word out of a song.’”

<sup>55</sup> LXX, JB (ed. Fisch, 1997), NAS, NAB, NIV, and NJPS (2d ed., 1999).

<sup>56</sup> RSV and NRSV.

<sup>57</sup> KJV, ASV, JB (ed. Fisch), and BBE.

<sup>58</sup> Alter, *Art of Biblical Poetry*, 29.

or the result of the action contemplated in the first half of the poetic line.<sup>59</sup> In Ps 37:2, as we have translated it here, the action in the first half of the line is, “for like green grass they will be *cut down* soon” and the consequence or result follows in the second half of the line, “and like lush new grass they will shrivel.”

Alter correctly observes:

We . . . repeatedly find that an utterance in the second verset, whether or not it is parallel in meaning to the first verset, occurs there because it *follows* from the initial utterance . . . as an objective event in a chain of events . . . In all this, it is important to recognize the underlying connection between the movement within the line, from one verset to the next.<sup>60</sup>

He invokes the descriptive language of R. Jakobson, the language of the axis of selection and the axis of combination,<sup>61</sup> but then correctly modifies this concept to more accurately reflect what occurs in biblical poetic lines that demonstrate consequentiality:

Perhaps it would be better to put aside the Jakobsonian imagery of axes, with its suggestion of movements set at right angles to each other, because what we frequently find in biblical verse is the emergence of the syntagmatic from the paradigmatic: . . . by the very logic of specification or intensification of the system in which he works [the poet begins] to push the initial image or idea into action, moving from one image to another that is temporally subsequent to and implied by the first. Narrativity, in other words, asserts itself at the heart of synonymity . . .

[a] common configuration of sequentiality is a movement from cause to effect, which is necessarily also a temporal movement and hence implicitly narrative.<sup>62</sup>

In trying to describe “how” Ps 37 means, these last two lines from Alter accurately

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 30-32. In Alter’s scanning of Ps 18 he presents several examples of consequentiality in parallel half-lines. His symbol for this device is a simple arrow (→) drawn between the two halves of the lines in which this device occurs. See also R. Alter, *World of Biblical Literature*, 73, 178-79, 182-86.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 35, 37.

<sup>61</sup> Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics,” in *Language in Literature*, 71.

<sup>62</sup> Alter, *Art of Biblical Poetry*, 37-38.

describe what appears to be taking place in v. 2. The main point for this reading of Ps 37 is to note the potential play on words (semantically) involving the root **מלל**. First, in this psalm the root **מלל** is a potential synonym of **כרת**, a keyword in the poem.<sup>63</sup> Second, this root anticipates the recurrent theme that will play out through the poem—the wicked, though they appear to be strong and vibrant like lush green grass or like a native tree (v. 35), are in fact chopped down, cut off, withered and “not found” (v. 36b). This language is part of the overall satirical<sup>64</sup> description of the wicked in this psalm. The ambiguity of the root **מלל**, “to wither” or “to be cut off,” adds to the richness of this satire.

#### *More Poetic Devices*

Before leaving discussion of this central theme, attention should be called to the sound play between the two antonyms **שמר** (vv. 28, 34, 37) and **שמד** (v. 38). The sound play between these two terms underscores their starkly opposite semantic meanings as used in this poem: “to keep, to guard, protect” versus “to exterminate.”

In addition to the wordplay between these two terms, again in vv. 37b and 38b, the repetition of the term **אחר ית** is significant. The repetition, coming at the end of each bicolon, functions to underscore the contrast between the fate of the wicked and the fate of

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<sup>63</sup> For another probable occurrence of **מלל** in the sense of “cut off,” see Job 24:24. Also, it is interesting in this regard that Auffret (*Que Seulement*, 136) sees an inclusio-type connection between vv. 1-2 and vv. 7b-9a based upon the repetition of the phrase “Do not become enraged because of . . .” (. . . **אל-תתחר ב**) and because of the thematic connection between the verses’ depiction of the fate of the wicked (“fade and wither,” v. 2) and (“be cut off,” v. 9a).

<sup>64</sup> The work on biblical satire by Thomas Jemielity, *Satire and the Hebrew Prophets* (LCBI; Louisville, Kent.: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), is the most thorough work on the topic to date.

the righteous—a major motif of Ps 37. Here in these verses the term ארית denotes the time afterward or following the present time and should therefore be translated “descendants.”<sup>65</sup> Thus, here at the “end” of this poem the contrast is between the man of well-being or prosperity who has descendants (cf. vv. 25-26) and between the wicked whose descendants will be exterminated (cf. v. 28b).

### *Ambiguity and Satire*

Psalm 37:35 poses another interesting example of ambiguity in connection with the term ערה (“to expose oneself; to become or be naked”).<sup>66</sup> The editors of BHS<sup>67</sup> remove the ambiguity by suggesting we read עלה (“to raise oneself up, exalt oneself”). The Septuagint translation of v. 35 lends support to this suggested reading with its “επαίρω” (middle voice, “to raise up oneself”). N. Herman Ridderbos, however, maintains the Masoretic Text’s reading and translates the phrase: “. . . and who shamelessly spreads himself out . . .”<sup>68</sup>

This translation is admittedly not as lucid as the emended reading (“and who towers/raises himself up”). Nevertheless, the preserved ambiguity opens the door for a

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<sup>65</sup> Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT*, 1:37.

<sup>66</sup> Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT*, 1:882. This term appears in the hithpael form in this text and in Lam. 4:21b. Its only other psalmic occurrences are in Ps 137:7 (piel, “to uncover, strip naked”) and Ps 141:8 (piel, “uncover, empty”).

<sup>67</sup> *BHS*.

<sup>68</sup> Ridderbos, *Die Psalmen*, 276, n. 10: “. . . und der sich schamlos ausbreitete . . .” [my translation]. On the issue of questioning suggested emendations in the Psalter, note the interesting comment by J. Fokkerman in the introductory chapter to his, *Psalms in Form*: “I would like to emphasize here already that the Psalter requires considerably fewer emendations and conjectures than is usually thought necessary in current Bible scholarship” (10).

reading of verse 35 as satirical. The metaphor of the wicked person being like a green, robust tree is to be found in the last phrase of v. 35, **כִּאֲזֶרֶחַ רֵעֵנָן**. But the reading of the Masoretic Text's **עָרָה**, “to expose oneself, to uncover one’s nakedness,” introduces the potential reading that at the height of his glorious power<sup>69</sup> the wicked person is shamelessly (or better, shamefully) exposing himself. Nakedness as a result of being uncovered or stripped of one’s clothing was recognized as a shameful, humiliating, and powerless predicament.<sup>70</sup> Such a satirical presentation of the wicked opponent of the righteous is thematically parallel to earlier lines in this poem that envision the wicked drawing their sword to slaughter the upright only to end up running themselves through with their own sword (vv. 14-15). Both vv. 15 and 35 sound the note of divine reversal—a common theological motif in the Old Testament.

What is the function of such satire in a work that castigates one’s opponents and celebrates their demise? Satirical language is one way to heap scorn upon the wicked enemy. Such language also functions to enjoin others—the hearers of the poem – to mock and to heap scorn upon the wicked.<sup>71</sup> According to one writer, satire encompasses innocence or unawareness on the part of the person(s) who is the butt of the joke.<sup>72</sup> Here

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<sup>69</sup> Hebrew: **עָרָה** (“violent, powerful”). See Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT*, 1:884.

<sup>70</sup> Douglas R. Edwards, “Dress and Ornamentation,” in *ABD*, 2:233.

<sup>71</sup> T. Jemielity, *Satire*, 24-26; Weisman, *Political Satire*, 3, 7-8. See also Reed Lessing, “Satire in Isaiah’s Tyre Oracle,” *JSOT* 28 (2003): 110 and Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1975), 27-30.

<sup>72</sup> D. C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony* (London: Methuen, 1969). According to Muecke’s definition, the other two characteristics of satire are: (1) a structure of double-

in vs. 35, the wicked person is secure in his power, like a mighty tree, but is unaware of the fact that he is exposing himself and is thus shamed or disgraced. Furthermore, refusing to substitute the emended reading for v. 35 also preserves the consonance, aurally and visually, involved in the repetition of two radicals ע and ר in the terms ערה and עריץ.

### *More Artistic Components*

Verse 40 of Ps 37 contains an interesting connection between the two roots: רשע and ישע. This wordplay occurs on two levels—repetition of sound (auditory) and repetition of written consonants (visual). In this case, however, the repetition of radicals and the resultant sound play is not complemented by the denotative meanings of the terms.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, Jakobson reminds us that in poetry words with different meanings are often connected by similarities in sound.<sup>74</sup> The sound play in v. 40 is especially interesting because of the juxtaposition of these two terms which, in the overall context of the poem, are thematically opposed—“wicked ones” and “saves / delivers.” Yuri Lotman interestingly observes that very often “sound repetitions may establish additional bonds between words, introducing contrasts and oppositions into the semantic organization of the text which are less clearly expressed or completely absent on the level

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layering, and (2) a presentation of opposition or contrast between those two levels (19-20).

<sup>73</sup> As was the case with Ps 34:22, “רשע,” and “רעה.”

<sup>74</sup> R. Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics,” *Selected Writings*, 3:43. See also, Y. Lotman, *Poetic Text*, 58-59, 133 and *Structure of the Artistic*, 47. Lotman goes further when he notes that “words which are mutually isolated in the system of natural language prove to be *functionally* [italics added] synonymous . . . when they occur in structurally equivalent positions” (*Structure of the Artistic*, 170).

of natural language.”<sup>75</sup> For Lotman, the phrase “natural language” refers to prose in contrast to poetry.

On the issue of the connections between Pss 34 and 37, these poems often appear together in a list of “wisdom psalms” or in a list of “wisdom influenced” psalms.<sup>76</sup> The most striking parallel between these two acrostic poems is the shared phrase in 34:15a and 37:27a: **סֹר מֵרַע יַעֲשֶׂה-טוֹב**. This parallel is even more interesting because it appears in the first half of the **ס** line in both poems. An additional connection between Pss 34 and 37 involves the key root **צַדִּיק**, which appears in the following texts: 34:16, 20, 22; 37:12, 16, 17, 21, 25, 29, 30, 32, and 39. Finally, both of these poems end with similar bi-colas involving the following shared Hebrew terms: **חַסֵּה** and **בּו** (34:23b; 37:40b).

One of the key phrases throughout Ps 37 is the phrase “inherit the land.”<sup>77</sup> This phrase occurs five times throughout the poem (vv. 9, 11, 22, 29, and 34). Additionally, there is one more reference to the land in v. 3. Those who trust in Yahweh, those who look to him and are blessed by him (i.e., the lowly righteous)—they will remain in the land and inherit the land. This repetition of the term **אָרֶץ** thus functions to tie together

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>76</sup> On the criteria for the classification of Ps 37 and other psalms as “wisdom psalms,” see R. Murphy, “A Consideration of the Classification ‘Wisdom Psalms’” (VTSup 9; Leiden: Brill, 1963), 156-67; Ridderbos, *Die Psalmen*, 267; and W. H. Bellinger, Jr., *Psalms: Reading and Studying the Book of Praises* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1990) 124-6, 128, 133-4. Crenshaw (*Psalms: An Introduction*, 94) surprisingly prefers doing away with the separate category of wisdom psalms and instead speaking of wisdom-like psalms.

<sup>77</sup> The Hebrew roots involved are: **יָרַשׁ** and **אָרֶץ**.

other themes and parts of the poem. For example, the repetition of this phrase serves to equate the following internal appellations for those who trust in Yahweh: “those who wait for Yahweh” (vv. 9, 34) // “those who are afflicted” (v. 11) // “those who are blessed by (Yahweh) (v. 22) // “the righteous ones” (v. 29). It is also noteworthy that vv. 3 and 34, with their emphasis upon the land at the beginning and the ending of the poem, are further linked by the use of imperatival phrases in both lines.

### *Summary*

I began this chapter focusing on the linguistic connections between Ps 37 and Ps 9/10. The identified linguistic and poetic connections included semantic links, macro-patterning, and repetition of roots. Such artistic devices further emphasize the close relationship between these two poems. This close relationship extends to the very structures of the bicola as pointed out by D. N. Freedman.<sup>78</sup> But Ps 37 creates its own literary world and imagination and within that world displays undeniable unity, structure, symmetry, and artistic finesse.

The main functions of most of these identified poetic devices are to bring balance and symmetry to the overall poem, to tie together the various sections of the poem and to support the overall unity of all the sections. This result occurs, and can be observed, regardless of whether or not the original poet or the editor of the book intended such affects.<sup>79</sup> An equally important set of functions of these artistic components must not be overlooked—the pleasure or “entertainment” value to the readers and hearers of the poem, both ancient and modern. As pointed out earlier by Jemielity, this “entertainment

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<sup>78</sup> Freedman, *Psalm 119*, 2, 13, and 22-23.

<sup>79</sup> Jakobson, “Subliminal,” in *Language in Literature*, 251, 261.

value of the Hebrew Scriptures for its audience should not be dismissed.” His point is that these writings can “please as well as teach.” In this suggestion, Jemielity is reflecting a much earlier observation about the entertainment or aesthetic value of songs in particular made by J. A. Sanders.<sup>80</sup>

The pleasure of a sarcastic comment about one’s enemies or the pleasure of a wittily crafted phrase or wordplay is as legitimate as the didactic function of a psalm.<sup>81</sup> The entertainment and resultant joy of hearing a clever sound play, or a pun, or a word fitly spoken should not be dismissed as insignificant. These functions and affects should not be forgotten for they are part of the continued, effective poetic power and intricacy of the poem. Even ambiguity functions within this psalm as a powerful artistic device. The openness of the polyvalence associated with ambiguity serves to encourage openness on the part of the reader—openness to the imaginative inner world of the psalm.

Now I have come to the last of the alphabetic acrostics in Book I. If one accepts the earlier suggested metaphor of bookends, this psalm is one of two alphabetic acrostic bookends for the Psalter’s first Book. This chapter noted inter-textual connections between Ps 37 and Ps 9/10. It is now appropriate to turn our attention in the next chapter to other inter-textual connections between these four alphabetic acrostics, possible connections to the psalms contiguous to these acrostics, to the function(s) of these acrostics in Book I, and to their function(s) in the Psalter as a whole.

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<sup>80</sup> Jemielity, *Satire*, 25; James A. Sanders, *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text: Canon as Paradigm* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987; repr., Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2000), 16.

<sup>81</sup> Jakobson, “The Dominant,” in *Language in Literature*, 43.

*Translation*

1: Of David. Do not become enraged because of the wicked; do not be jealous of the ones who practice unrighteousness.<sup>82</sup>

2: For like grass they will be cut down<sup>83</sup> soon and like lush green grass they will (soon) wither.

3: Trust in Yahweh and do good; dwell in the land and take delight in faithfulness.

4: Delight yourself in Yahweh<sup>84</sup> and he will give you the desires of your heart.

5: Entrust to Yahweh your way and trust in him and he will do (good)<sup>85</sup>

6: and will cause your righteousness to go forth like light and your justice like midday.

7: Be silent before Yahweh and wait for him! Do not become enraged over the one whose way prospers—over the man who devises plots.

8: Let go of anger and abandon wrath! Do not become enraged (leading) merely to **evil**.

9: for the **evil**<sup>86</sup> ones will be cut off but the ones who wait for Yahweh, *they* will possess the land.

<sup>82</sup> The Hebrew term עֹלֵה (עֹל) is an antonym of the term “righteous/righteousness” (צִדְקָה) that occurs several times throughout this poem: vv. 12, 16, 17, 21, 25, 29, 30, 32, and 39. Compare Ps 125:3. See also *TWOT*, sec. 1580b and R. Knierim, “עֹל,” in *TLOT*, 2:849-50.

<sup>83</sup> Or “fade.”

<sup>84</sup> Use of underlining to highlight that P. Auffrett (*Que Seulement*, 134) calls attention to the repetition of YHWH after the first and the fifth imperatives in these two verses.

<sup>85</sup> Although “good” (טוֹב), from v. 3a, is not repeated in v. 5b, this latter phrase is a case of ellipsis – a common feature in biblical poetry. The phrases in vv. 3a and 5b are otherwise very similar. Note the repetition of the imperative form of בָּטַח and of the root עָשָׂה in both bi-cola as well as the reference to Yahweh as the object of trust in both lines.

<sup>86</sup> Boldface print is used to highlight this example of anadiplosis in vv. 8-9.

10: And yet, (in) a short time/soon and the wicked person is not—you will diligently look at his place but he (they)? will not be;

11: but the afflicted ones will possess the land and they will delight themselves in an abundance of peace.

12: (the) wicked person plots<sup>87</sup> against the righteous person, and grinds his teeth at him.

13: The Lord<sup>88</sup> laughs at him for he sees that his **day** is coming.

14: The wicked ones draw a sword and bend their bow, to bring down the afflicted and the poor, to butcher the ones who are upright in (their) way.

15: Their sword will enter into their (own) heart and their bows will be shattered.

16: Better is the pittance belonging to the righteous person than is the plenty of many wicked persons.

17: For the strength/arms<sup>89</sup> of the wicked ones will be shattered<sup>90</sup> but YHWH supports the righteous ones.

18: YHWH knows the **days**<sup>91</sup> of the blameless ones and their property<sup>92</sup> will last forever;

19: they will not be ashamed in the time of evil—in the days of famine<sup>93</sup> they will be satiated.

<sup>87</sup> Hebrew זָמַם. Compare the cognate in v. 7: מִזְמוֹת .

<sup>88</sup> Interesting shift from YHWH, used throughout the poem, to אֲדֹנָי.

<sup>89</sup> זָרוּעַ.

<sup>90</sup> שָׁבַר. See also v. 15b.

<sup>91</sup> Compare “day” in v. 13. The boldface print is used to emphasize this repetition. Auffret (*Que Seulement*, 142-3) focuses on the repetition of this term in these verses to support his schema in which vv. 13 and 18 are contrastive.

<sup>92</sup> Perhaps better to translate “property” (נַחֲלָה) due to the poem’s heavy emphasis upon possession of the land.

<sup>93</sup> Note the intensifying specificity of the phrase “in the days of famine.”

20: for the wicked ones will be **destroyed** and the enemies of YHWH are like the glory of pastures,<sup>94</sup> they vanish—like smoke they **vanish**.<sup>95</sup>

21: The wicked person borrows and does not repay but the righteous person is generous and gives.

22: for the one whom he blesses will possess the land but the one cursed by him will be cut off.

23: from YHWH the steps of a valiant man are firmly established.

24: for if he falls he will not be thrown down; for YHWH upholds him by his hand.

25: I have been young and now I am old but I have never seen a righteous person forsaken or his seed seeking bread.

26: All the days he is generous and lending and his seed becomes a blessing.

27: Turn from evil and do good and dwell forever.

28: for YHWH loves justice and he will never forsake his steadfastly loyal ones; they will be guarded forever but the seed of the wicked ones will be cut off.

29: The righteous ones will possess the land and they will dwell in it forever.

30: The mouth of the righteous person is wisdom and his tongue speaks justice.

31: The law of his God is in his heart; his ways never waver.

32: The wicked person watches for the righteous person and seeks to kill him.

33: YHWH will never abandon [see v. 8] him into his hand nor will he ever let him be convicted in a legal case.

34: Wait on YHWH and keep his way and he will exalt you to possess the land. When the wicked ones are cut off you will see it.

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<sup>94</sup> Or “like precious lambs.”

<sup>95</sup> In this line, the Hebrew term כלה (vanish) is a synonym of אבד (be destroyed, perish, v. 20a). The boldface is meant to highlight the connection. The connotation of “perish, be destroyed” associated with כלה is bolstered by the fact that כלה carries this same denotative meaning in the following texts: Pss 18:38b; 39:11b; 71:13a (see NJPS). See also: Isa 1:28b; 29:20 (parallel to כרת/cut off); 31:3c; Jer 16:4; 44:27b; Ezk 5:12a; 13:14b.

35: I have seen the wicked person being tyrannical and shamelessly spreading himself out<sup>97</sup> like a lush native tree,

36: And he disappeared<sup>98</sup> and behold, he was not.

37: Observe the blameless and look at the upright for the person of peace<sup>99</sup> has a future<sup>100</sup>

38: but transgressors will be destroyed together; the wicked one's future will be cut off.

39: The deliverance of the righteous ones is from YHWH—their refuge *in time of trouble*<sup>101</sup>

40: YHWH helps them and he rescues them—rescues<sup>102</sup> them from the wicked ones and saves them because they take refuge in him.

<sup>97</sup> So N. H. Ridderbos, *Die Psalmen*, 276, n. 10.

<sup>98</sup> Hebrew עבר.

<sup>99</sup> See earlier characterization of the righteous person having “peace” (v. 11).

<sup>100</sup> In view of the poem's emphasis upon “seed” of the righteous and the wicked, probably the connotation of “posterity” does attend here to the Hebrew term: אחרית (thus NRSV, etc). It does, however, seem prudent to translate the term “future” in the text and thus maintain the term's polyvalence—that is, the future existence of the wicked person (vv. 2, 9, 10, 20, 22, 34, and 36). In support of the connotation “posterity” here in v. 38, see v. 28b.

<sup>101</sup> Note the echo of the earlier phrase “*in a time of evil*” in v. 19.

<sup>102</sup> Note the use of anadiplosis for emphasis and for heightening. Verse 40b specifies from whom they are delivered, and thus goes beyond mere repetition.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Conclusion

#### *Emendation versus Appreciation*

In the history of research and in the individual commentaries and works on the alphabetic acrostics, we saw that very often an attempt is made to “reconstruct” the psalmic text via emendation. Sometimes this emendation of the Masoretic text actually eliminates the acrostic pattern. Such emendation is unfortunate and often unnecessary or even questionable. In many cases we have seen that a more plausible explanation for a difficult reading is found to be putatively poetic and artistic. That is, the poetic contribution of the difficult reading is motivation to keep the Masoretes’ text and to reject suggested emendations—especially those emendations that have no textual support from other ancient witnesses. One might even suggest that the difficult reading be retained or read even if there is some textual evidence in support of its emendation, *if* the difficult Masoretic reading functions integrally in the poetic, artistic, or rhetorical world of a particular psalm. A sensitivity towards and an appreciation for these poetic functions, not unlike an appreciation for the intricacies of a musical score, enables a reader to enjoy the beauty and power of the poem’s language. If the Masoretic text is emended, especially without textual evidence, then this poetic power is potentially obfuscated.

For example, consider these six cases from the four alphabetic acrostic poems we have reviewed:

1. In Ps 10:5 there is an interesting suggestion made by the editors of *BHS* that, if accepted, would help restore the alphabetic acrostic pattern which, at this stage of Ps 9/10

is apparently corrupted. The *BHS* editors' suggestion is to emend מרום to סרו. This emendation, of course, provides a ס strophe for the acrostic poem. But the emendation, while providing a ס strophe, would also destroy the concert of sound that is created by the three successive initial *mems* found in the phrase: מרום משפטיך מנגדו.

2. In Ps 25:3b the editors of *BHS* suggest emending the Masoretic text by omitting the second occurrence of יבשו, as a case of dittography, and accepting another reading. It was argued in chapter three of this study, however, that the double occurrence of יבשו in Ps 25 is in fact a poetic use of repetition and is also an example of a chiasmic patterning on the grammatical level or as Jakobson would say, the grammar of poetry.<sup>1</sup>

This occurrence of a repeated root is, therefore, an example of the poetic, and even chiasmic, style of verse 3 of the poem. With the retention of the Masoretic reading—the repetition of the root בוש—the chiasmic patterning extends even to the grammatical/syntactical level of this verse.

3. Another supposedly difficult Masoretic reading appears in Ps 25:6a and involves the repetition of the tetragrammaton יהוה. Actually, if the repetition of this root is retained, the envelope structure of vv. 6-7 is preserved. This envelope or “sandwich” structure occurs both on the semantic and on the grammatical level.

4. In Ps 34:10, the double occurrence of the root ארץ is questioned by the *BHS* editors. They cite the Syriac Peshitta as a textual witness for the omission of the first

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<sup>1</sup> Roman Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics,” “Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry,” and “Grammatical Parallelism,” in *Language in Literature* (ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy; Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap/Harvard, 1987), 90, 121-22, 128, 132-33.

occurrence of this root from the Masoretic text. The repetition of the same root, albeit in two different forms, at the beginning and the ending of the same line is known as *polyptoton*<sup>2</sup> and is a literary device that functions to emphasize both the semantic and the phonological unity of a poetic line. Once again, omitting this repeated term would disrupt the poetic structure of this line.

5. Ps 37:36 is another instance in which the proposed emendation suggested by the *BHS* editors is in conflict with the internal, poetic ambiguity of the Masoretic reading. The editors of *BHS* suggest emending v. 36a to read, “I passed by . . .” for the term **ויעבר**, proposing that one instead read **ויעברי**, with the LXX and the Syriac versions. Retaining the Masoretic reading makes it possible to preserve a poetic use of alternating persons in the grammatical forms of certain terms in vv. 35-36.<sup>3</sup>

6. Finally, in connection with Ps 37:9, the editors of *BHS* suggest that the root **המה** be omitted due to *metri causa* (“on account of the meter”). The sound play, however, between the two terms in vv. 8-9, **המה** and **המה**, functions to tie these two verses together within the world of this poem. Thus the issue is a choice between accepting an editorial suggestion, putatively to maintain the poetic meter, versus maintaining the Masoretic reading that in fact preserves a connective wordplay (specifically, a sound play)

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<sup>2</sup> Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics,” “Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry,” and “Grammatical Parallelism,” in *Language in Literature*, 90, 131, 157, and 160.

<sup>3</sup> Jakobson, “Poetry of Grammar,” in *Language in Literature*, 121-22.

between two terms that are both visually and aurally similar.<sup>4</sup> Preserving the *internal* word play between similar terms is preferable to accepting the editorial suggestion.

*Poetic Artistry and the Acrostic Structure*

A more macro-level focus on the alphabetic acrostic psalms is now appropriate. David N. Freedman's technical focus upon meter, the length of cola, and upon syllable counts within the alphabetic acrostic psalms is a good place to begin. Freedman's work is fascinating and is foundational for further inquiry into possible structural patterns. Is Freedman's study also foundational for further examination of the theology and the poetic artistry of these poems?<sup>5</sup> The answer to this question indeed depends on one's definition of "foundational," but certainly Freedman's work is intriguing and an important contribution to a complete understanding of the acrostics. Jakobson argues there should be no strict dichotomy made between structure and poetics.<sup>6</sup> In fact, these two aspects of a text work in tandem, both giving and receiving *to* and *from* each other.

Several of the ancient biblical commentators recognized this fact, to include writers

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<sup>4</sup> Compare Soll's observation regarding the importance of visual similarities in the composition of certain Babylonian acrostics: "On the other hand, there is no multiplicity of signs used to represent the same sound in the acrostic; even if one of the syllables could be represented by a number of signs, the same sign was used at the beginning of each line in the strophe. Thus, the most important consideration was a conceptual or visual one: the use of the same sign" in Will Soll, *Psalm 119: Matrix, Form, and Setting* (CBQMS 23; Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association, 1991), 8.

<sup>5</sup> Freedman's opinion is that it is foundational. See David N. Freedman, *Psalm 119: The Exaltation of Torah* (with Jeffrey C. Geoghegan and Andrew Welch; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," and "Poetry of Grammar," in *Language in Literature*, 90, 121-2, 128, 132-3.

such as Philo of Alexandria, Jerome, and Cassiodorus.<sup>7</sup> These biblical scholars were interested in the metrics of the Psalter's poetry but they also had an appreciation for aesthetics and artistry. In other words, structure and poetic devices or artistic flourishes were seen in tandem rather than as mutually exclusive. Nor do these writers appear to regard logical structure as more important or as more legitimate than artistry. Their approach to the Psalter's poetry is, therefore, more balanced than many post-Enlightenment, Western commentators' approach.

The alphabetic acrostic psalms in Book I are perhaps not as "logical" in their thematic development as are the other lament psalms, but they are not thereby less powerful. This charge of "illogical structure" actually goes all the way back to R. Lowth.<sup>8</sup> Could the "logical sequence" label and criterion, and the "deficiency" accusation, be primarily a Western philosophical bias or "lens" superimposed upon (ancient) Eastern literature? Could it be, perhaps, an Aristotelian logic holdover?<sup>9</sup>

As seen in chapter one of this study, the history of research of these four alphabetic acrostic psalms is preoccupied, with a few exceptions noted, with explaining the (reconstructed) history of the acrostic pattern. Little to no attention, generally speaking, is paid to the poetics or the artistic or rhetorical structure of these poems. The main

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<sup>7</sup> Philo, *Contempl. Life* 1.84; 3.29; 10.80; *Agriculture* 17.81-18.82; *Dreams* 2,41.269; *Sobriety* 29.111; *Moses* 2,46.256-7; Jerome, *Homily 4: Ps 9*; Cassiodorus, *Psalms* 1.36-41, 246-7; 3.465.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Lowth, *Lectures on Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* (2d ed.; trans. G. Gregory; 2 vols.; London: J. Johnson, 1787), 1:57; 2:134.

<sup>9</sup> See Thomas F. O'Dea and Janet O'Dea Aviad, *The Sociology of Religion* (FMSS; 2d ed.; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1983), 41-47 on M. Weber's definition of Western humanity's "maturity" in terms of transitioning to the strict rationalization of thought, that is, the supremacy of logic.

structure attended to is the acrostic pattern—which itself is actually considered to be artificial and thus, basically extraneous to the poem. In fact, in some interpreters' minds the acrostic pattern is not only extraneous but a burden to be borne by the poem—a literary “straitjacket,” so to speak.

Herein lies the beauty of Freedman's monograph—he definitely views the acrostic structure and also the technical structure in a positive light—as contributing to rather than detracting from the psalm. In contrast to many of the studies summarized in the history of research, and following the lead of Freedman, this present study has treated the acrostic patterning as one of several artistic elements within these particular poems. In fact, the acrostic patterning may be legitimately described as a recurring motif or theme (linguistically speaking) in these four psalms. Jakobson has taught us to expand our definition of artistic elements and themes to include linguistic phenomena such as grammar, syntax, and morphology.

Therefore, a more positive, constructive view of the alphabetic acrostic patterning has been foundational to this current study. This attitude is in stark contrast to the predominately negative view of the acrostic structure—a view that sees the structure as an impediment to artistic and poetic expression. To put it diplomatically, “the aesthetic motivations of the composers of acrostics have not been fully appreciated . . . the purpose of the alphabetic acrostic is not mnemonic. It is, rather, aesthetic, and needs to be seen as such even if it has lost its attractiveness in the eyes of many modern interpreters.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Soll, *Psalms 119*, 33, 34.

*Structural and Linguistic Connections between Acrostics*

Along this line of examination, it is appropriate now to think about specific shifts in the first four alphabetic acrostics in relationship to the specific letters of the acrostic patterning. Soll notes that a shift in content *from* thanksgiving and praise occurs in the *lamed*—the midpoint of the Hebrew alphabet—lines of Ps 9/10 and Ps 34.<sup>11</sup> In Ps 9/10, this shift is from the thanksgiving content of the first half of the poem (Ps 9) to the lament section of the poem that is foreshadowed in 9:20-21 but that begins in earnest in 10:1. In Ps 34 this shift is from the thanksgiving content of the first half of the poem (34:1-11) to the more wisdom-influenced, didactic section of the poem, vv. 12-23.

A closer look at these two psalms that, according to Freedman<sup>12</sup> are not structurally related (metrically), reveals an interesting thematic connection in their opening lines in addition to the similar shifts in conjunction with their *lamed* lines. The *aleph* and *beth* strophes of Ps 9/10—vv. 2-5—and the *aleph* and *beth* strophes of Ps 34—vv. 2-3—open each of these two poems with a prologue of personal praise. The reader should note the predominance of the first person singular in both of these openings. The significance of these structural/thematic connections is seen when one contrasts the other two alphabetic acrostic poems that are structurally similar to Ps 9/10 and Ps 34 respectively.

Psalms 9/10 and Ps 37 are structurally parallel but do not share this opening prologue of praise in their respective opening *aleph* and *beth* strophes. Both Ps 25 and Ps 34 are structurally or metrically parallel but do not share this opening prologue of praise. In fact

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 13, 14, 30. On the significance of the midpoint of the Hebrew alphabet in connection with abecedaries, see Michael D. Coogan, “Alphabets and Elements,” *BASOR* 216 (1974): 61-3.

<sup>12</sup> Freedman, *Psalms 119*, 2.

the *aleph* and *beth* strophes of both Ps 25 and Ps 37 begin with lament and wisdom-influenced language respectively. Therefore, even in the two Book I alphabetic acrostics that are *not* similar or parallel structurally there appears to be a connection related to the first two alphabetic strophes—*aleph* and *beth*. This observation means that even though the structural parallel is not as complete as in the case of Ps 9/10 // Ps 37 and in the case of Ps 25 // Ps 34, there is, at least in the beginning of Pss 9/10 and 34, some literary and thematic connection.

These four alphabetic acrostics, joined by structure and by placement in Book I, evidence similar, but not uniform, preferences for literary devices. The following sections will summarize some of the most intriguing literary and linguistic traits that surfaced during this study of the four Book I acrostics.

### *Psalm 9/10*

Psalm 9/10 is the only one of these poems that displays a continuation of the acrostic patterning emphasis on a micro level—in other words, five successive *alephs* in the first couple of verses. This additional attention to the alphabetic acrostic structure, as was stated in chapter two, anticipates the additional attention to the acrostic pattern in Ps 119—the *magnum opus* of biblical acrostics. Additionally, at the other end of these five *aleph*-initial words in Ps 9, are found five word-ending *hehs*. These five identical ending letters combined with a five-fold repetition of the initial letter brings a balance and a morphemic symmetry to this poem that is unsurpassed in the other acrostics poems although one should note that in Ps 37:20 there are five words that begin with the identical letter—the letter א. While the placement of this linguistic phenomenon is

different in these two poems, towards the beginning in Ps 9/10 and in the middle of Ps 37, this occurrence of five repeated initial consonants in these two poems is interesting in light of their recognized structural similarities.<sup>13</sup>

Another hallmark of Ps 9/10 is its biting sarcasm and satire directed towards the wicked and, surprisingly, its sarcastic language directed towards Yahweh in 10:1 and 9-11. While sarcastic language is directed towards Yahweh in other passages in the Hebrew Bible (Pss 13:2-3; 89:47; Job 19:15-22; Isa 45:15; and Jer 20:7), Ps 9/10 is unique among the alphabetic acrostics in this regard. That is, while the other alphabetic acrostics in Book I use satire and sarcasm, the use of this type of language applied to Yahweh sets Ps 9/10 apart. This observation fits well with the fact that out of the four acrostics in Book I, overall Ps 9/10 seems to exhibit the greatest proclivity towards the use of ironic or sarcastic language.

Also, Ps 9/10 functions in tandem with two other alphabetic acrostics to serve in two separate “bookending” roles. The first is on the macro level, so to speak, in which Ps 9/10 shares two juxtaposed roots<sup>14</sup> with Ps 145 as noted earlier. These two psalms, of course, are the first and the eighth of the eight alphabetic acrostic poems in the Psalter. The second bookending role involves the connections between Ps 9/10 and Ps 37—the first and fourth acrostics in Book I. And so, both on a macro and a micro level, Ps 9/10 linguistically and structurally partially serves to bookend the Psalter’s acrostic poems.

Another hallmark of Ps 9/10 is the use of reported speech. Other poems in the Psalter make use of reported speech but Ps 9/10 is the only one of the acrostic psalms to

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> The two roots are: ברך and הלל.

do so—in either Book I or Book V. This phenomenon is perhaps due to Ps 9/10’s proclivity towards sarcastic language.

*Psalm 25*

Only in Ps 25 among the Psalter’s alphabetic acrostics does the psalmist confess personal sin and iniquity (vv. 7, 11, 18). The chapter on this psalm noted the stark contrast between this poem and Ps 9/10 which maintains a strict dichotomy between the wicked and the righteous—the poet residing in the latter camp. There is also an interesting contrast between Ps 25 and its structurally-parallel acrostic, Ps 34, in this regard. Specifically, if one examines the two out of the three Ps 25 verses in which this confession of guilt by the one who “fears Yahweh” (v. 12) appears, they occur in the π line (v. 7) and in the ♪ line (v. 11). Interestingly, in the structurally-parallel Ps 34 the π line (v. 8) and the ♪ line (v. 12) are also two out of the three places in which Ps 34 refers to those who fear Yahweh—a common way to refer to the righteous in the Psalter. Another interesting structural feature of Ps 25, one that deserves further investigation, is its symmetrical, balanced organization.

It was noted in chapter three that Ps 25 makes use of a rhetorical device that is usually found in narrative more than in poetry—the rhetorical question. In addition to Ps 25:12, there are eight other rhetorical questions in the first book of the Psalter and so this technique is not unique to the alphabetic acrostic poems or to other “wisdom-influenced” psalms. The other rhetorical questions are well spread out through Book I and one will note that there is one other acrostic in the list (see Pss 6:6; 8:5; 10:13; 14:4; 18:32; 27:1;

30:10 and 35:10).<sup>15</sup> This use of an artistic technique that is relatively rare in the Psalter is again testimony to the creativity and literary sophistication of the acrostic poems.

#### *Psalm 34*

One of the hallmarks of Ps 34 is its striking use of repetition of word roots, synonymous terms, and the repetition of certain sounds or phonemes. One of the significant repeated roots is YHWH—the covenant name of ancient Israel’s god. This keyword occurs sixteen times in the poem. More importantly, the placement of this keyword is crucial to the structure, the symmetry, and the sense of the poem.

In section II (vv. 5-11) and in section IV (vv. 16-23), Ps 34 focuses intently on Yahweh’s care and protection of the people Israel. It is also in these two sections that twelve of the sixteen occurrences of the term YHWH appear—six in section II and six in section IV. The highly structured repetition of YHWH in Ps 34 serves to balance the poem symmetrically while at the same time serving to underscore the theological message of sections II and IV. The number twelve is intriguing, of course, due to its association with ancient Israel. This phenomenon deserves investigation in later studies.

Interestingly, this repetition of the term YHWH in Ps 34 provides an additional link

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<sup>15</sup> Ps 34:13 contains a question, beginning the **h** line, just like Ps 25:12. The question in 34:13a, however, does not appear to be rhetorical question but rather, a question that introduces a following definition of who is acceptable to Yahweh and thus will live a long life (compare Ps 15:1-5a). In contrast the rhetorical question in 25:12 (and 10:13) asks a question not for information but to persuade the hearers by “implying that the answer is self-evident . . . to everybody and therefore not to be doubted . . .,” according to Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (JSOTSup 17; trans. Dorothea Shefer-Vanson, 1989), 211.

to Ps 25—Ps 34's "structurally parallel" acrostic according to Freedman's analysis.<sup>16</sup>

The keyword YHWH does not occur as many times in Ps 25 as in Ps 34, but out of the ten occurrences in Ps 25, eight of the occurrences are in the same alphabetic line of the acrostic. For example, the first occurrence of YHWH in Ps 25 occurs in v. 1, in the acrostic's א line. Similarly, in Ps 34 the first occurrence of this key term is in v. 2—the poem's א line. This linguistic connection occurs in seven more of the remaining nine occurrences of the term YHWH in Ps 25. Consider the following verses. The corresponding alphabetic lines are indicated in parentheses: Ps 25:4 // Ps 34:5 (the ד lines); Ps 25:6 // Ps 34:7 (the ו lines); Ps 25:7 // Ps 34:8 (the ז lines); Ps 25:8 // Ps 34:9 (the ח lines); Ps 25:10 // Ps 34:11 (the ט lines); Ps 25:11 // Ps 34:12 (the י lines); and Ps 25:15 // Ps 34:16 (the ק lines).

Additionally, the linguistic connection between these two acrostics may be even more intricate than first appears. In the case of the poems' א lines, in both cases the key term YHWH appears as the second pronounced or read term in the lines:

Ps 25:1 אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה נִפְשֵׁי אֲשָׁא

Ps 34:2 אֲבָרְכָה אֶת־יְהוָה בְּכָל־עֵת תָּמִיד תְּהַלְתּוּ בְּפִי

The occurrence of יהוה in Ps 34:2 is the second *read* word, even with the appended object marker and maqqef.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Freedman, *Psalm 119*, 2, 8-13.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Joüon, S.J., *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (trans. and rev. T. Muraoka; 2 vols.; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1996)1:58 (sec. 13a): "The two words linked by a maqqef form a phonetic unit: the first word has lost its main stress and now can have only a secondary stress, in other words, it becomes proclitic."

Similarly, in the 7 lines of Pss 25 and 34 the key term YHWH appears as the second read word<sup>18</sup> in the lines:

Ps 25:4 דרכיך יהוה הודיעני ארחותיך למדני

Ps 34:5 דרשתי את־יהוה וענני ומכל־מגרותי הצילני

Thus in the case of eighty percent of the occurrences of the key term YHWH in Ps 25, the term also occurs in the corresponding alphabetic line in Ps 34. This linguistic phenomenon provides another link between these two acrostic poems that also share the following traits: (1) the two poems are structurally identical and (2) the two poems stand at the center of the four alphabetic acrostics of Book I; that is, they comprise the center “panel”<sup>19</sup>, so to speak, of the Book I acrostics. Freedman also notes this central positioning of these two structurally-similar Psalms—Pss 25 and 34.<sup>20</sup>

This current study has also tried to remember that the acrostic patterning and the other grammatical and morphemic patterning in these four poems operates on two levels: a visual (written) and an aural (oral) level. This position is in stark contrast with other commentators who have insisted that the acrostic patterning can only appeal to the eye and not the ear.<sup>21</sup> Such limiting of the potential functions of a poetic or artistic device

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 47. Cf. David Damrosch, “Leviticus,” in *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 76.

<sup>20</sup> Freedman, *Psalm 119*, 22: “The basic division with four psalms in the first book (2 pairs in an envelope construction 9/10[2], 25[1], 34[1], 37[2] . . .”

<sup>21</sup> Lothar Ruppert, “Psalm 25 und die Grenze kultorientierter Psalmenexegese,” *ZAW* 84 (1972): 578 and Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Traditional Techniques in Classical Hebrew Verse* (JSOTSup 170; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 89.

seems unwise. To follow the logic of this argument one would have to argue further that it is impossible that the acrostic patterning ever appealed artistically to any hearers aurally.

It seems best to leave open, at the very least, the potential of more than one rhetorical affect or function of an artistic component. This approach also recognizes the fact that the oral and written aspects of biblical material, especially songs, cannot be simply dichotomized into watertight, separate stages.<sup>22</sup> This interplay of oral and written is the reason that this study often makes use of tables, to juxtapose morphemically related terms in order to assist non-native readers of these acrostics in appreciating the intricate possibilities of the aural *and* visual impact of the many wordplays and sound plays.

An interesting connection between three of the four acrostics in Book I surfaced with respect to their frequent reference to body images. The three psalms and their respective verses are: Ps 9/10 (10:3a, 4a, 7, 8b, 11, 12a, 13b, 14a, 15a, 17b); Ps 25 (vv. 1a, 13a, 15, 17a, 20a); and Ps 34 (vv. 2b, 3a, 6b, 14a, 16, 17a, 19a, 21a, 23a).

Another interesting element common to all four acrostic poems is the heavy use of the imperative form. Following is a listing of the verses containing imperatives in these four psalms: Pss 9/10 (9:12a, 12b, 14a, 14b, 20a; 10:12, 15a, 15b); Ps 25 (vv. 4a, 4b, 5a,

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<sup>22</sup> See Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (LAI; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1996), see especially 1, 3-6, 24, 78, 108. Related to an overemphasis upon written literature or a written stage to the exclusion of the importance of orality, see James A. Sanders, *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text: Canon as Paradigm* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987; repr., Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2000), xi-xii, 20, 83 on biblical scholars' tendency to visualize biblical writers sitting at a desk in a university study composing the biblical documents in insulation from the ongoing struggle which is the life of the community.

5b, 6, 7b, 16a, 16b, 18a, 18b, 19, 20a, 20b, 22); Ps 34 (vv. 4, 6, 9a, 9b, 10, 12, 14, 15a, 15b, 15c, 15d); Ps 37 (vv. 3a, 3b, 4, 5a, 5b, 7a, 7b, 8a, 8b, 27a, 27b, 34, 37a, 37b).

As can be seen, there are quite a few imperative forms appearing in these four acrostics. This list does not even include the prohibitions that are formed by the negative particle plus the imperfect form—an imperatival use of the imperfect tense. But such a predominant use of the imperative form should not be that surprising. The first book of the Psalter is full of laments, the overwhelming majority of which make frequent use of the imperative form. And thus this heavy occurrence of the imperative form in these four acrostics is largely attributable to their location in Book I and to the fact that two of the poems are generally classified as laments.

The argument by Hanson that the acrostic form should be recognized as a separate *Gattung* comes to mind here. I am not necessarily opposed to this idea. It does make sense, for on one level this current study presupposes that the acrostics are a group, tied together structurally, functionally, and often times, linguistically. But I do not know how helpful such a classification is in poetical analysis as pursued in this study. In the case of the use of the imperative I am inclined to think that with respect to the acrostics that are classified as laments (specifically, Pss 9/10 and 25), the imperative use is a trait of this type of psalm—the lament.

With respect to Ps 34, which is classified as a thanksgiving psalm and as for Ps 37, usually classified as a wisdom psalm, their heavy use of the imperative forms, like the Book I laments, is evidence that:

1. First, the *Gattungen* are fluid, not always water-tight categories.

2. Psalms 34 and 37 may indeed be a thanksgiving and wisdom psalm respectively, but they are also canonically part of Book I and may be influenced by the predominant laments with their characteristic use of the imperative form.

This present study also highlights the many and varied linguistic (semantic, grammatical, and morphemic) connections between the four alphabetic acrostic psalms in Book I. Of particular interest are the connections between the psalms that are structurally parallel in terms of their number of bi-cola per successive alphabetic letter. There appears to be parallelism in terms of their number of bi-cola per successive alphabetic letter. Perhaps a listing of these all together will strike the reader as impressive:

1. Ps 25:22 // Ps 34:23 – note the additional **ב** lines.
2. Ps 25:1, 13 // Ps 34:3, 23 – the shared term **נפח**.
3. Ps 25:3, 5, 21 // Ps 34:9, 34 – the shared root **קוה**.
4. Ps 25:1-7, 15-21 and 8-14 // Ps 34:1-7, 8-11 – both share a middle section of general praise for Yahweh's goodness *after* an initial seven verses of personal testimony to Yahweh's protection.

### *Psalm 37*

The most intriguing linguistic and literary traits of Ps 37 will be discussed under two headings. First, the bookending function of Ps 37, the fourth alphabetic acrostic in Book I, in conjunction with the bookending function of Ps 9/10, the first alphabetic acrostic in Book I. In this apparent bookending function, the first and the last of the acrostics in Book I serve to envelope these first four acrostics of the Psalter. In connection with this shared function, Pss 9/10 and 37 also share some interesting linguistic connections. These links were discussed in detail earlier in this study—in chapter five—in connection

with the repetition of the concepts “land” and “destruction/perish” in these two poems (Pss 10:16; 37:9; 37:11). In addition to these two poems being structurally parallel,<sup>23</sup> both of them call attention to the land. In the fourth acrostic the righteous inherit the land from which the wicked have been purged, according to the first acrostic.

Another linguistic connection bolsters the literary bookending function of Ps 9/10 and Ps 37. If both psalms are read together or read consecutively, one notes the three-fold repetition of the phrase “in times of trouble” (Pss 9:10; 10:1; 37:39). In these verses Yahweh is presented as first present, then hidden, then again present “in times of trouble.” This theme of vacillation in these two bookend psalms parallels the theme of vacillation found in many of the lament psalms of Book I—including some of the Book I alphabetic acrostics (Pss 9:6-7, 19; 13:3, 6; 22:2-3, 25-26; 35:17, 22, 28).

Second, a similarly interesting linguistic connection between Ps 37 and Ps 145 was discussed earlier in this study in chapter five. The connection involves the repetition of three Hebrew roots in a chiastic patterning (A B C C’ B’ A’) format.<sup>24</sup> Whereas the linguistic connections between Ps 37 and Ps 9/10 are intriguing because these poems are the first and last Book I acrostics, the connections between Pss 37 and 145 are intriguing for two reasons. These two poems: (1) are the fourth and eighth alphabetic acrostics in the Psalter, respectively and (2) are the last of the four acrostic psalms in their respective books (Book I: Pss 9/10; 25; 34; 37 and Book V: Pss 111; 112; 119; 145).

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<sup>23</sup> Freedman, *Psalm 119*, 13-19.

<sup>24</sup> See above, 164-5.

*Summary and Areas for Further Study*

This current study has engaged in a close reading of the first four alphabetic acrostics of the Hebrew Psalter. The conclusion of this reading is a sound rejection of the view that these poems are deficient with respect to development and style. The alphabetic acrostic patterning is not a sign of the poets'/editors' sloth, slovenliness, or lack of creativity. On the contrary, these poems have been shown again and again to be full of poetic artistry and to be individually part of a pattern of interconnectedness. These four psalms are anything but stiff, wooden, or unimaginative. Hopefully, the reader of this study has been lead into a reading of these psalms in which the *function* of their varied poetic devices has fostered a renewed appreciation for these poems as works of literary art. And yet, this study is not the end but a beginning. Other areas of study remain.

One area for further study is the significance of the numbers eight and four in connection with the Psalter's alphabetic acrostics. A beginning place for an investigation into the significance of the number eight is two astute observations by Freedman: (1) the number eight plays an important role in the numerology of the Psalter's alphabetic acrostic poems, especially with respect to Ps 119 and (2) the number eight is significant with respect to the traditional counting of the prophetic books: four former and four latter prophets.<sup>25</sup>

Another area of study is the interrelationships of the Book I and Book V acrostics—to include linguistic connections, thematic connections, and structural connections

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<sup>25</sup> Freedman, *Psalms 119*, 1-2, 5, 22-23, 25-26, 29-35, 54-55. Cf. Soll, *Psalms 119*, 35-36, 45, 51-52.

between the “non-structurally parallel” acrostics or pairs, as defined by Freedman.<sup>26</sup>

Another area involves additional linguistic, poetic, artistic, grammatical, sound plays, wordplays in the four acrostics of Book I that this study may have overlooked and which a fresh reading of these beautiful and powerful poems may reveal.

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<sup>26</sup> Freedman, *Psalm 119*, 2-23.

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