PILGRIM THEOLOGY:
WORLDMAKING THROUGH ENACTMENT OF
THE PSALMS OF ASCENTS (PSALMS 120–134)

A thesis submitted to Charles Sturt University
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Certificate of authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge and belief, understand that it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Charles Sturt University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgment is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Charles Sturt University or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged.

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Signature: [Signature]

Date: 13 July 2016
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Ethics approval

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Abstract

This thesis critically explores the theological perspectives of the Psalms of Ascents (Psalms 120–134), sometimes referred to as the Pilgrim Psalter, through text and performance. Three particular perspectives are considered: anthropo-logic, cosmo-logic, and theo-logic. These are adapted from William Brown’s approach to the theological interpretation of Scripture. Each one is refracted through a corresponding effect of the text that also emerges in performance: emotional, kinaesthetic, and relational. Adopting Christopher Seitz’s argument that the canonical arrangement and ordering of biblical texts has theological implications, this thesis approaches the Psalms of Ascents as a theologically coherent collection with intentionality to their canonical presentation. In particular, their shared superscription connecting them to pilgrimage functions as both a frame for performance and a hermeneutical lens for interpretation of the collection sequentially. An innovative component of this thesis is the incorporation of the author’s own memorisation and performance of the text, as well as analysis of audience responses to these performances, as part of the interpretive process. The theological interpretation of the collection therefore integrates critical analysis of the text combined with performance-based research, utilising the emerging methodology of biblical performance criticism through contemporary performance of an ancient text. This combination provides a significant enrichment to the understanding of the theological trajectory of the Psalms of Ascents. This is a theology designed to be entered into and experienced, or “enacted.” What emerges from this study is aptly termed a “pilgrim theology.” Taking the performative nature of the collection along with the framing effect of its superscription, those who enact these psalms find their identity as pilgrims redefined, their engagement with the world as a place of journey reconstructed, and their relationship with a dynamic and multidimensional God reframed. This thesis
demonstrates that the effect of the Pilgrim Psalter is, to use Walter Brueggemann’s term, “worldmaking.”
### List of abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABR</td>
<td><em>Australian Biblical Review</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>ASV</td>
<td>American Standard Version</td>
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<tr>
<td>BBR</td>
<td><em>Bulletin for Biblical Research</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BHS</td>
<td>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bib</td>
<td><em>Biblica</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>BSac</td>
<td><em>Bibliotheca Sacra</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>BTB</td>
<td><em>Biblical Theology Bulletin</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBQ</td>
<td><em>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEV</td>
<td>Contemporary English Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ComRv</td>
<td><em>The Communication Review</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ConTR</td>
<td><em>Contemporary Theatre Review</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CurTM</td>
<td><em>Currents in Theology and Mission</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CV</td>
<td><em>Communio Viatorum</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESV</td>
<td>English Standard Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETL</td>
<td><em>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ExpTim</td>
<td><em>Expository Times</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FQS</td>
<td><em>Forum: Qualitative Social Research</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FZPhTh</td>
<td><em>Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>HAR</td>
<td><em>Hebrew Annual Review</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Hebrew Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>HUCA</td>
<td><em>Hebrew Union College Annual</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>HvTSt</td>
<td><em>Hervormde Teologiese Studies</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEJ</td>
<td><em>Israel Exploration Journal</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Int</td>
<td>Interpretation</td>
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<tr>
<td>JANES</td>
<td><em>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>JAOS</td>
<td><em>Journal of the American Oriental Society</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>JBL</td>
<td><em>Journal of Biblical Literature</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>JESOT</td>
<td><em>Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>JHS</td>
<td><em>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</em></td>
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**JSOT** *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*

**JTI** *Journal of Theological Interpretation*

**JTS** *Journal of Theological Studies*

**LASBF** *Liber annuus Studii biblici franciscani*

**LCQ** *Lutheran Church Quarterly*

**LTP** *Laval théologique et philosophique*

**LXX** *Septuagint*


**MT** Masoretic Text

**NASB** New American Standard Bible

**NIV** New International Version

**NJPS** The New Jewish Publication Society Version of the Tanakh

**NKJV** New King James Version

**NPNF¹** *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1

**NPNF²** *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 2

**NRSV** New Revised Standard Version

**NTS** New Testament Studies

**OTE** *Old Testament Essays*

**RB** *Revue biblique*

**RSV** Revised Standard Version

**Sem** *Semitica*

**SJOT** *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*

**TBT** *The Bible Today*


**TZ** *Theologische Zeitschrift*

**VT** *Vetus Testamentum*

**ZAW** Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

Introduction

Walking around Cologne Cathedral seeing the biblical story unfold on the stained-glass windows was an “aha!” moment for me, as I realised that the biblical text was not always, or even primarily, received as written words on a page. Listening to the words of Psalm 122 spoken from memory by a local resident as I walked through the Zion Gate entering the Old City of Jerusalem for the first time, I recognised that these ancient words visualised a real place and spoke to me about my own place in the world. Whenever I read the opening words of Psalm 139 and hear in my imagination the voice of God speaking through the version I memorised as a six-year-old, I appreciate the powerful effect of the biblical text when it is internalised rather than read externally.

For many, engagement with Scripture is an individual pursuit: a silent scanning of a printed copy held in the hands. Reading the Bible in such a way is relatively recent, however, and the reader risks missing the richness of all the text has to offer. Study of the Bible as a written text has been the source of a wealth of insights, yet likewise there is still more to be apprehended by employing other methods of engagement. The intention of the Scriptures is not limited to the provision of information; the text explicitly seeks to transform those who engage with it. This means consideration must be made not only of what texts say, but also of the effects they have.

In this thesis I intend to bring together two emerging areas of research in biblical studies – theological interpretation of Scripture and biblical performance criticism – to discern the effects of the Psalms of Ascents (Psalms 120–134), sometimes called the Pilgrim Psalter, on those who participate in their use, a form of engagement I call “enactment.” Enacting is more than reading; it involves internalisation and embodiment of the text. Psalms are particularly appropriate for this study due to their inherently communal and performative nature as well as the way they express their theology.
through imagery and poetry. The Psalms of Ascents provide a unique, discrete, coherent collection within the Psalter upon which to focus. Their well-defined boundaries and comparative conciseness make them a practicable collection for this study, but more significantly their shared superscription connected to the idea of pilgrimage provides a hermeneutical lens through which to consider them. This analysis demonstrates that the Pilgrim Psalter itself evokes reflection on the particular theological world that its enactment generates, a world that can be best construed as “pilgrim theology.”

In addition to analysing the performance possibilities of these psalms, I have included the use of performance as a method of research. The use of performance is not intended to supplant traditional methods of inquiry, but rather to contribute an additional perspective: as Performance Studies theorist Dwight Conquergood says, “I do not imagine life in a university without books, nor do I have any wish to stop writing myself. But I do want to keep thinking about what gets lost and muted in texts.”¹ All interpretations are by nature provisional and partial, but performance is acutely self-conscious of the fact that it allows texts to speak multivalently and is influenced by the location of the exegete-as-performer. Likewise, the approach of theological interpretation of Scripture is not to seek to replace other methods of biblical criticism, but to complement them. It, too, is self-conscious in the way it allows the nature of Scripture to influence and shape the interpretation it provides.

The metaphor of pilgrimage evoked by the Psalms of Ascents offers a useful analogy. Pilgrimages, like performances, are ongoing and need to be repeated. The pilgrim, like the performer, is reshaped by the re-enactment of the journey. The pilgrimage undertaken in this thesis cannot claim to answer every question about these texts once and for all. It can provide a model for another way to engage with the text

and discover new dimensions of its transformative work and interpretive texture. By focusing on the distinctive and constructive theological contribution of these particular texts, I seek to discern the ways they function to reshape reality for those who participate in their use, in a word, how they can be “worldmaking.”

The first chapter of this thesis examines and evaluates previous scholarship on the Pilgrim Psalter, presenting an overview that is broadly chronological and groups scholars by approach taken to the text. It provides an overview of the interpretive influences that have been important in understanding the collection and are built upon in this thesis. It seeks to ascertain areas of consensus and dispute as well as to identify the range of methodologies that have been applied to the collection. This helps to provide the parameters for the current study. Chapter 2 explains the theoretical and methodological approaches that guide the research undertaken in this thesis. The first of these is theological interpretation of Scripture, which is the primary objective of this thesis. The second is a canonical approach to theological interpretation, which provides the hermeneutical framework for my approach to the text. The third is biblical performance criticism, which is a key methodology adopted in researching the text.

As this thesis adopts a text-focused approach, the third chapter provides an original translation of Psalms 120–134 from the Hebrew text, paying particular attention to grammar, form, syntax, and tense, as well as to performative, poetic, and aural dimensions of the text. Chapter 4 examines my use of performance as a method of research, explaining how the translation was memorised and performed for a number of audiences, and draws on feedback received to discern the impact of the performances. Although this audience research provides valuable data on the overall effect of the collection, the primary focus in this thesis is on what I discovered as the researcher-as-performer.
Part C of this thesis, Chapters 5–8, consists of a theological interpretation of the Psalms of Ascents based on both the text and its performance. The canonical approach adopted results in the superscription to Psalms 120–134 providing a hermeneutical lens and performative frame for interpretation of the collection sequentially. The superscription’s effect also provides a broad scaffold for Chapters 5–8, my theological interpretation of the Psalms of Ascents, which utilises the idea of pilgrimage as a guide for the journey of reading Part C of the thesis.
PART A: BACKGROUND

Chapter 1: Previous scholarship on the Psalms of Ascents

1.1 Introduction

This chapter critically investigates the history of scholarship on the Psalms of Ascents as a collection to establish areas of consensus and dispute and to identify the results and limitations of previously applied methodologies. Areas of consensus, including the treatment of these psalms as a collection and the function of the superscription, provide a foundation for the study of these psalms undertaken in this thesis. Areas of continued dispute, including the date and authorship of these psalms, provide boundaries within which to limit the scope of this study. The results and limitations of previous studies provide impetus for the new areas of research that this thesis investigates.

The Psalms of Ascents have long fascinated interpreters due to their uniqueness as a designated collection within the Psalter. They have been widely used devotionally as a collection of songs connected to ideas of pilgrimage, whether actual or as a metaphor for the life of faith. As is seen below, however, critical scholarship focused on the collection has tended to consider primarily questions regarding the meaning of the shared superscription, the historical setting and origins of the individual poems, and their editing, redaction, and collection.

The majority of commentators on the Psalter have looked at the meaning of the individual poems within the Psalms of Ascents, often connected to others of similar type or date, rather than considering the collection as a whole. Wilson’s seminal work has stimulated interest in the editing of the Psalter as a book, which in turn has led some recent commentators to undertake analysis of the various collections contained

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within it, yet this approach continues to be employed largely for historical, rather than theological, ends.³

With a plethora of interpretive approaches developing in contemporary scholarship, the Pilgrim Psalter’s clear demarcation and relative brevity also appear to have contributed to a propensity for some scholars wishing to apply a new theory to a select group of psalms to choose this collection for the theory’s initial application. It has been used as material for case studies in terms of poetic structure and formal features of poetry,⁴ but not, as yet, for a theological or performance approach.

This chapter presents a broadly chronological overview of previous scholarship on the collection, grouped by approach taken to the text. Its twin foci are on major Psalms commentators as well as those scholars who have specifically considered Psalms 120–134 as a collection. This approach emphasises the shifts in wider Old Testament scholarship, as well as Psalms research, and the way these have impacted on interpretations of the Psalms of Ascents. Recurring themes are also highlighted, demonstrating the broad consensus, for example, on the meaning of the superscription, as well as areas of continued dispute, such as the date and authorship of both the individual psalms and the collection. This overview demonstrates the predominance of historical-critical approaches to the collection and underlines the potential contribution of alternative theological and performative perspectives can make to this area of scholarship.

³ A creative example is found in Michael D. Goulder, The Psalms of the Return (Book V. Psalms 107–150) (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998) who uses his postulated setting for the composition of the Psalms of Ascents (see below) as the basis for his understanding of the purpose of the whole of Book V of the Psalter.
1.2 Pre-critical approaches

1.2.1 Judaism

There are two brief references to the Psalms of Ascents in the Mishnah, both connecting the number of psalms in the collection with the number of steps leading from the Israelites’ court to the women’s court:

C. And the Levites beyond counting played on harps, lyres, cymbals, trumpets, and [other] musical instruments,

D. [standing, as they played] on the fifteen steps which go down from the Israelites’ court to the women’s court—

E. corresponding to the fifteen Songs of Ascents which are in the Book of Psalms—

F. on these the Levites stand with their instruments and sing their song.5

Q. And fifteen steps go up from it to the Israelite courtyard,

R. one each for the fifteen Songs of Ascents in Psalms [Ps. 120–134],

S. on which the Levites say their song.6

These references indicate that from their earliest interpretation, these psalms were treated as a collection and were connected with community performance. The reference to the correspondence between the number of steps and psalms is employed by later commentators to advance the proposition that this collection of psalms were to be sung by the Levites on the temple steps descending from the court of Israel to the

6 Mishnah, Middot 2:5.
court of the women. Rashi, an eleventh century rabbinic commentator, also refers to a Talmudic legend regarding David’s foundation of the temple, the rising waters of the deep, and his composition or singing of the fifteen Psalms of Ascents in this context, either to raise the water level, or to cause the water to subside.

So said R. Johanan: When David was mining under the altar to get water, water burst out ready to overflow the world; there he composed the fifteen songs of degrees, and therewith checked it.

To the modern critical reader, these sorts of “folk” explanations might seem peculiar, but we too quickly dismiss ancient readings. The two divergent explanations for the collection’s superscription suggest its precise historical referent was not known. They do indicate that this group of psalms was viewed as a coherent collection even from earliest times. Furthermore, both explanations have a performative dimension, suggesting the psalms were understood as linked to enactment of some kind.

1.2.2 Church Fathers

Early Christian commentators on the Psalms treat these fifteen psalms as a collection. The majority of early Christian writers on the Psalms of Ascents understand the superscription allegorically, connecting it to the individual soul’s ascent toward God. For example, Origen, the influential third century theologian, notes in his Songs of Songs commentary that the reader of these fifteen psalms, “by examining the

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7 For example, see Mayer I. Gruber, Rashi’s Commentary on Psalms (The Jewish Publication Society: Philadelphia, 2007), 698. See also John F. A. Sawyer, “The Psalms in Judaism and Christianity: A Reception History Perspective” in Jewish and Christian Approaches to the Psalms: Conflict and Convergence (ed. Susan Gillingham; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 134–143, 139–141, who understands the connection with the temple steps to be “an affectionate title for a group of special favourites among the Psalms.”

8 Gruber, 698.


excellences of each ... will acquire from them steps for the soul in its progress.”

Jerome, the fourth century scholar best known for his translation of the Scriptures into Latin, reminds his listeners that such a “mystical” interpretation is the commonly accepted understanding of the day: “These gradual psalms, as you have heard me say often enough, are called songs of ascent because in them we mount step by step to greater heights.”

Similarly, Augustine, Jerome’s contemporary and fellow Doctor of the (Western) Church, expounds in his comments on Psalm 120, “Who are they that ascend? They who progress towards the understanding of things spiritual.”

The prevalence of this view is summed up by sixth century Roman writer and statesman, Cassiodorus, who asserts: “when we hear the word steps in the psalms, we are not to think of anything material to be mounted by physical movement, but we should interpret it as the mind’s ascent. The word canticle has been placed first so that we may apply it rather to the progress of the soul.”

This kind of allegorical interpretation of the collection’s superscription has fallen out of favour with the rise of critical scholarship. It indicates, however, a theological interest in these psalms for the church in early times that might have been overlooked more recently. Furthermore, the notion of ascent and pilgrimage has been a pervasive metaphor for life and faith throughout church history, giving these psalms a broad connection to the Christian community’s theological interests.

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13 Augustine, Exposition on the Book of Psalms, NPNF, 8:1171.
15 For example, Augustine, The City of God (426); Dante Aligheri, The Divine Comedy (1320); Geoffrey Chaucer; The Canterbury Tales (1478); John Bunyan, The Pilgrim’s Progress (1678).
1.2.3 Medieval and reformation interpretations

Jerome notes that there was a fifteen-step staircase in the temple and imagines the Levites and priests standing on these steps in descending order according to rank.\textsuperscript{16} These ideas are embellished by the spiritualising methodologies of medieval scholars such as Bruno, eleventh century teacher of Pope Urban II and founder of the Carthusian Order, who connects these stairs with the more prominent steps leading into the Holy of Holies.\textsuperscript{17} Others assert that each of the Psalms of Ascents was sung on a successive step.\textsuperscript{18} Although these imagined settings are speculative, for present purposes they serve as a reminder that these psalms have long been considered performative in nature.

The approach of the two most prominent scholars of the Reformation is characterised by a combination of these medieval explanations for the collection with an emphasis on the connections between the psalms and the Christian life of their communities. Martin Luther’s commentary collects a series of sermons on the Pilgrim Psalter, focusing on particular teachings discerned in the individual psalms relevant to his setting, including marriage and the primacy of the word of God, rather than a broader theological perspective. Regarding the superscription, he refers to a theory that these psalms were used at the “finishing and closing up of the divine service,”\textsuperscript{19} but he sees the “simple and plain sense” of the title as denoting their performance by Levites or priests upon steps or some other high place.\textsuperscript{20} John Calvin briefly surveys possible

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{16} Jerome, “Homily 41,” 301.
\textsuperscript{19} Martin Luther, \textit{A Commentary on the Psalms Called the Psalms of Degrees: In which, among other Interesting Subjects, the Scriptural Doctrine Respecting the Divinely Instituted and Honorable Estate of Matrimony is Explained and Defended, in Opposition to the Popish Errors of Monastic Seclusion and Enforced Celibacy} (1532–33; trans. H. Bull; 1577, repr. London: W. Simpkin and R. Marshall, 1819), 110.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Ibid.}, 109.
\end{flushright}
meanings for the title within his commentary on Psalm 120, finding a reference to fifteen steps “silly conjecture” and a reference to the exile “altogether forced.”21 There is a certain irony, therefore, in the proposal he finds the most probable: they were sung in a higher key than other songs.22

Image 1.1: Loredano’s musical setting of Psalm 121

22 Ibid., 43.
In the earliest extant book devoted to the collection, complete with engravings and musical notation, Giovanni Loredano develops the idea of the soul’s ascent, dividing the collection into three groups of five psalms: those he deems suitable for noviciates, proficients, and professors respectively.\(^{23}\) He accepts a variety of possible occasions for the collection’s original use including the return from exile and the re-dedication of the temple. He also notes that the title might refer to their use on the steps of the temple or merely to the tune or key in which these songs were sung.\(^{24}\) His commentary on each individual psalm includes a lyrical paraphrase with accompanying sheet music (see Image 1.1 above), demonstrating his desire that these psalms might be re-used by his community.

The general approach taken to these psalms for the majority of their reception history has thus included a dual focus on their performative nature and on their theological purpose. As the trajectory of modern Psalms scholarship has headed in other fruitful directions, these two ideas have often been overlooked. In this thesis they are revisited and re-evaluated in light of the findings of recent, critical scholarship.

### 1.2.4 Nineteenth century

Several nineteenth century British pastors and scholars published monographs on the collection. These largely focus on the interpretation of each individual psalm, although they each include some discussion of the meaning of the title. MacMichael views Psalms 120–134 as pilgrim psalms and imagines the setting of each individual psalm

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within this context, although he does not consider the collection as a whole.\textsuperscript{25} Conversely, Armfield’s commentary includes a separate chapter on the collection as a whole. He concludes that the superscription refers primarily to deliverance from calamity or distress,\textsuperscript{26} although he accepts a possible double entendre referring to the location in the temple where these psalms were later used.\textsuperscript{27} His commentary is notable for its consideration of both Jewish and Christian uses of these psalms in worship and to this end he has translated the Targum and presents every reference to the collection found in the \textit{Midrash Tehillim}.\textsuperscript{28} Cox notes that these psalms have been “more praised than studied,”\textsuperscript{29} and presents some proposals for their historical setting and their inclusion as a collection. He reconstructs their setting in the context of pilgrimage, understanding the title to refer to the ascent to Jerusalem for the annual festivals.\textsuperscript{30} He asserts that they were brought together as a collection by the pilgrims themselves\textsuperscript{31} and imagines the use of each individual psalm as part of the pilgrims’ journey, an approach that continues to be popular in devotional treatments of the collection.\textsuperscript{32}

The consistent references to the collection \textit{qua} collection evidence a \textit{prima facie} acknowledgement of its unity and coherence. The review of these works demonstrates the tendency of pre-twentieth century commentators to focus on the meaning of the title with respect to the consequent use of the collection by their communities of faith, a

\textsuperscript{26} Henry Thomas Armfield, \textit{The Gradual Psalms, a Treatise on the Fifteen Songs of Degrees, with Commentary} (London: J. T. Hayes, 1874), 13–14. He also has a chapter arguing more generally for the treatment of superscriptions as integral parts of the psalms.
\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Ibid.}, 20–21.
\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Ibid.}, xiii.
\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ibid.}, 7.
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Ibid.}, 9.
theological and ecclesial approach that arguably still has value for the contemporary Christian community of faith, without ignoring the later insights of critical scholarship.  

1.3 Form critical approaches

The emergence of so-called Higher Criticism in nineteenth century Germany transformed all areas of biblical study. The emphasis in Old Testament studies shifted from discerning the meaning of the text for current readers to reconstructing the particular historical situation in which texts were written, thus prioritising the world behind the text. The difficulty for Psalms scholarship was the lack of historical context inherent in this genre. German Lutheran scholar, Hermann Gunkel, the most renowned Old Testament interpreter of his day and the founder of modern Psalms study, introduced form criticism, which attempts to discover the broader historical context for a poem by consideration of the life setting (Sitz im Leben) that would give rise to a particular form or type of psalm. He then sought to discern the major categories or genres (Gattungen) of psalms, an approach that became foundational for subsequent scholarship.

Gunkel’s Psalms commentary34 looks at each individual psalm in turn without any discussion of the Pilgrim Psalter as a whole, while his introduction, completed by his son-in-law shortly after his death, makes only brief reference to Psalms 120–134 as a collection.35 He acknowledges the Pilgrim Psalter’s prior independent existence, accepting the title as referring to pilgrimage, and sees the collection’s purpose as “fall[ing] between a devotional and prayer book on the one hand and a cultic psalter on

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33 See Jason Byassee, Praise Seeking Understanding: Reading the Psalms with Augustine (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 9–10.
34 Hermann Gunkel, Die Psalmen übersetzt und erklärt (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1926). His comment on the title of Psalm 120, 538, contains only the terse explanation: “eigentlich ‘die Wallfahrtstider’” (“actually ‘the pilgrimage songs’”).
the other.” Gunkel classifies only Psalm 122 as belonging to a specific “minor” genre he calls pilgrimage song, assigning the other Psalms of Ascents to a variety of genres. Gunkel’s student, Sigmund Mowinckel, further developed this approach to Psalms scholarship by linking genre to liturgical use in worship, particularly focusing on comparative studies between the worship of Israel and her neighbours. In a footnote on the Pilgrim Psalter, he proposes that was the title of the collection as a whole and takes as a starting point the use of the verb יָהֹלֵךְ for YHWH’s ascent rather than the ascent of the people as pilgrims. He therefore translates the superscription as “songs for the过程ions,” proposing that these psalms were composed for use at the festivals of harvest and tabernacles rather than on the journey to them. His commentary, like Gunkel’s, focuses on the genre and historical setting of each individual psalm without consideration of the collection as a whole.

In continuity with this approach, three monographs from the early twentieth century apply form critical approaches specifically to the Psalms of Ascents to consider their date and historical setting. According to Siegart, there was general agreement at the time amongst what he calls the “modern school of German and English scholars” that these psalms are, “as a whole, folk songs.” More specifically, he views Psalms 121, 124, and 127–129 as ancient folk songs later appropriated for pilgrim use, Psalm 132 as pre-exilic, Psalm 120 as a song of the exiles’ return to Jerusalem, and Psalms 122 and 126 as “clearly” post-exilic. He proposes that they were later collected together for use during the journey to feasts and at ceremonies. Siegart makes reference

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36 Ibid., 347.
37 Ibid., 236.
39 Ibid., 2:195.
41 Ibid., 400, 402, 405, 406.
42 Ibid., 410.
43 Ibid., 400.
44 Ibid., 401, 404.
to theological themes within individual psalms, but does not draw his analysis together to present any more detailed conclusions for the collection as a whole.

Liebreich considers the redactional process for the collection by making “verbal tallies” between the Psalms of Ascents and words in the Aaronic blessing.\(^{45}\) He contends that the correlation is more than merely keyword correspondence and, further, that these psalms are “an elaboration upon four key words of the Priestly Blessing.”\(^{46}\) The addition of three songs without verbal connections to the blessing (Pss 124, 126, and 131) is explained by a desire to have fifteen psalms corresponding to the fifteen words of the blessing.\(^{47}\) Liebreich makes the leap from verbal correspondence to intentional composition with little explanation, proposing that these psalms are a “precursor of the homilies on the Priestly Blessing found in Midrashic literature.”\(^{48}\) Finally, he proposes that this connection sheds light on the question of the title. Blessings were pronounced on the temple steps, thus the phrase שֶׁ֣רֶדֶּכֶּלֶּחָ֑ו would mean, “a Song rendered in conjunction with the Priestly Blessing which was pronounced on the מָלֶֽוֶה.”\(^{49}\) Subsequent scholars have not found Liebreich’s specific proposal compelling, but his early work on key words has provided a starting point for more recent theological exploration of the collection.

Preß considers the historical setting of the “Wallfahrtspsalmen,” suggesting a Sitz im Leben of Babylonian exile due to their liturgical attitude, the strength of the Zion tradition they contain, and their lack of reference to the great acts of salvation-history.\(^{50}\) He notes the wide variety of genres found within the collection, leading to their


\(^{46}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 34. His reasoning is somewhat circular, however, as he states that the psalms are connected to the blessing because they focus on Zion and Zion is connected to the blessing because of its prominence in the psalms.

\(^{47}\) Liebreich does not consider why this same desire would not simply have driven the collectors to include, redact, or create another three psalms that also had verbal connections to the blessing.

\(^{48}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 36.

\(^{49}\) \textit{Ibid.}

treatment by form critics individualistically rather than as a group.\textsuperscript{51} He attempts to move beyond these classifications to link individual psalms with other portions of Scripture and then construct their historical setting on that basis. He finds some parallels between the Psalms of Ascents and Lamentations, suggesting a similar “innere Zusammenhang,”\textsuperscript{52} but the psalms have become hopeful songs. He believes this more clearly corresponds with the time of deuter-o-Isaiah and thus that they are a prophetic anticipation of the return from exile.\textsuperscript{53} He considers their purpose, therefore, not primarily to encourage Israelites to make pilgrimage, but to call on YHWH to bring “die große Wende im Geschick Zions.”\textsuperscript{54} This historical perspective considers only the original purpose of the songs and their composition, rather than the purpose of their collection and preservation for use by later communities.

More recent Psalms commentators from a variety of theological traditions continue to use the form critical approach. Those who have given consideration to how this approach applies to the Pilgrim Psalter include Westermann, Gerstenberger, and Goldingay. Westermann considers Psalms 120–134 to be a pre-existing collection displaying a “certain material unity.”\textsuperscript{55} He acknowledges Gunkel’s smaller genre of “pilgrimage song” for Psalm 122 but suggests that this concept was generalised so that songs of other types could be added to collections such as this one.\textsuperscript{56} Gerstenberger accepts the Psalms of Ascents as a separate collection based on their “fixed formulaic superscription” and accepts as likely that the collection was intended for use by pilgrims.\textsuperscript{57} He sees this as a retrospective canonical reading, however, and is more

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 401.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 408 (“internal context”).
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 410–11.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 406 (“the great turning point in the fate of Zion”).
\textsuperscript{56} Claus Westermann, \textit{The Psalms: Structure, Content and Message} (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980), 100.
interested in discerning the setting and use of each individual psalm than how the
collection works for communities who enact it.\textsuperscript{58} Goldingay also has a strong emphasis
on the genre of individual psalms.\textsuperscript{59} He thus shows little interest in the Psalms of
Ascents as a collection, leaving any explanation of the title to a brief glossary and
thereby ignoring its possible impact on interpretation. He concedes that most of the
psalms in the collection are “idiosyncratic” instances of the forms he proposes,\textsuperscript{60} but this
does not lead him to consider that an alternative approach might be possible.

As can be seen, genre analysis of the fifteen Psalms of Ascents has yielded a
variety of proposals for categorising these poems and has led most form critics to
conclude that the individual psalms have diverse origins. The dominance of this
approach has led to great effort being expended seeking to discern the historical settings
that could give rise to such diversity, but adjudicating the likelihood of such settings
remains fraught. At the same time, the consistencies of language and themes within the
collection have led other voices to argue for unity of composition. Thus the form critical
goal of discerning the collection’s \textit{Sitz im Leben} has not been achieved with any
certainty. Of significance for this thesis is the broad acknowledgement amongst these
scholars that the final collection as a whole is connected to the practice of pilgrimage.

1.4 Redaction critical approaches

A number of studies in the last forty years have continued to scrutinise historical issues
including the meaning of the title, the origins of the individual psalms, and, in particular,
the redaction of the individual psalms and the collection. Redaction critics maintain the

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 321.
\textsuperscript{59} John Goldingay, \textit{Psalms 90–150} (Baker; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006). He expresses his frustration with
the “fruitless” and “speculative” nature of more recent redaction critical and compositional critical
approaches, \textit{ibid.}, 11, 544.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 498.
historical-contextual focus of form critics but specifically examine the later work of editors in shaping and moulding earlier forms into the existing text.

In his significant monograph on the collection, Klaus Seybold designates Psalms 120–134 Wallfahrtspsalmen and finds a representation of the pilgrimage journey from beginning to end in their canonical order.\(^{61}\) He states, “Der Gruppie rung liegt demnach eine Phasen-oder Stationenvorstellung zugrunde, die dem Erlebniskreis der Wallfahrt entstammt. Von der Ankunft bis zur Abreise sind die Einzelstadien durch Texte in sinnvoller Abfolge markiert.”\(^{62}\) Seybold views the collection as a handbook that could be used by pilgrims on their way to an annual festival and/or by those returning from exile.\(^{63}\) He sees any theological or communal concerns as redactional insertions, arguing for composite authorship based on his literary analysis. He proposes a “Grundschicht” of popular piety composed for pilgrims journeying to Jerusalem and a “Bearbeitungsschicht” that has systematically redacted them with a Zion-blessing theology and a collective perspective.\(^{64}\) He appraises the base layer as characterised by being more poetic, influenced by Aramaic, and from a rural milieu,\(^{65}\) whereas the edited layer is more prosaic and theologically motivated.\(^{66}\) The base texts focus on the experience and rewards of blessing, the redactional texts on the theological aspects. He suggests the editors took existing texts with this theme of blessing and sorted them in a meaningful way to reinforce the idea.\(^{67}\) The major critique of Seybold’s redactional argument is its circular nature: he assumes individual and collective perspectives must


\(^{62}\) Klaus Seybold, “Die Redaktion der Wallfahrtspsalmen,” *ZAW* 91 (1979): 247–268, 267 (“The grouping is therefore based on a phase or station concept that comes from the circular experience of the pilgrimage. From arrival to departure the individual stages are marked by texts in a meaningful sequence.”).


\(^{64}\) Seybold, “Die Redaktion,” 252, 267 (A “base layer” and an “edited layer”).


\(^{67}\) *Ibid.*, 266.
be evidence of the two layers to which he has previously assigned such perspectives.\footnote{In the case of psalms where he cannot discern any evidence of editing, Seybold dismisses this as evidence that the editing was done particularly well.}

He also assumes any cultic, theological, or prosaic elements are redactional. Even if his assignation of various verses to different layers of composition is correct, he does not elucidate how this shapes interpretation of the final form of the texts.

In response to the view that the Pilgrim Psalter consists of previously existing disconnected poems, Beaucamp interprets it as a unified, pre-exilic composition.\footnote{Évode Beaucamp, “L’unité du recueil des montées, Psaumes 120–134,” \textit{LTP} 36 (1980): 3–15.} He locates the collection politically and religiously in the time of Josiah, suggesting these psalms might have been written by northern Israelites coming back to Zion after their release from Assyria,\footnote{Ibid., 11–12.} but he ignores evidence within the psalms pointing to a later date. He does conclude that Psalms 120–134 can be treated as a collection based on their shared linguistic features, regardless of the title,\footnote{Ibid., 3. Beaucamp argues that the prominence of the word Israel and the lack of reference to Judah, a mention of the “bull of Jacob” (Ps 132), and a reference to the “mountains” (plural) of Jerusalem are hints that these psalms have a northern Israelite origin.} highlighting the rich intra-textuality of the Pilgrim Psalter.

Deurloo, a scholar of the Amsterdam school of biblical exegesis, which particularly emphasises the “story” of the Bible, considers the redaction of the collection in terms of the great theological themes of the Old Testament, designating it a commemoration of the exile.\footnote{Karel A. Deurloo, “Gedächtnis des Exils (Psalm 120–134),” \textit{CV} 34 (1992): 5–14.} As Psalms 113–118 commemorate the exodus, so he proposes a liturgical role for Psalms 120–134 in remembering exile. He believes others have too hastily translated the title as pilgrimage songs when only Psalm 122 fits this description. He concedes that only Psalm 126 explicitly addresses exile, but suggests broader reflections on the collection’s contents, repeated phrases, and compositional order “die Position untermauern, daß es in dieser Reihe um die Bewegung der Umkehr
aus dem Exil geht.”

He asserts that the evocation of pilgrimage in the title implies that every ascent to Zion for a festival is simultaneously a commemoration of the return from exile. With this double meaning in mind, Deurloo suggests that the structure of the collection is understandable as a “suite.” He proposes three movements, with a determined “Steigerung in Intensivität und Thematik.”

The first sets the religious route of pilgrimage. The second emphasises the intolerable bondage, the surprising liberation by YHWH, and the “existentielle Wahl durch die Orientierung zum Zion.” Only in the third are the “höchste und tiefste Dimension der Umkehr” evoked: redemption, guilt, hope, messianic future, and reconciliation. These ideas support further theological reflection and consideration of the potential impact of the collection on subsequent communities enacting these psalms.

In the first published dissertation on the collection by an American, Crow is particularly interested in the collection’s redactional history. He surveys the range of understandings of the title but finds none adequate for each individual psalm. Consequently, he suspends judgment on its meaning. His comprehensive examination of each psalm is utilised to consider its origin and redaction, rather than the intratextuality of the psalms within the collection. He contends that features including the use of repeated formulaic phrases and the emphasis on Zion and Jerusalem are the result of editing the individual psalms into a collection.

He perceives, like Seybold, two layers in these texts, although he proposes composition of the original songs in northern Israelite agricultural settings during the Persian period. He suggests the redactor nationalised these psalms, giving them a Jerusalem-orientation and adding the title, with

73 Ibid., 8 (“support the position that there is a movement from repentance to exile in the series”).
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid., 13 (“increase in intensity and themes”).
76 Ibid., 14 (“existential choice to orient toward Zion”).
77 Ibid (“highest and deepest dimensions of reversal”).
78 Crow, 26–27.
79 Ibid., 130–45.
80 Ibid., 169.
the intention of promoting the practice of pilgrimage to those living in outlying areas.\textsuperscript{81} Although Crow’s examination of these theological emphases and intentions is firmly set within the context of discovering the collection’s original authorship, his work provides a strong foundation upon which to contemplate its later use.

The untimely death of Erich Zenger in 2010 has left Hossfeld and Zenger’s three-volume commentary on the Psalter as yet incomplete,\textsuperscript{82} but their commentary considers the full range of scholarly approaches to the Psalms. The historical-critical focus of their work delivers the most comprehensive contemporary application of form and redaction critical scholarship to the Psalter. Zenger’s significant excursus on the Pilgrim Psalter as a collection considers the range of possible meanings for מִלְמַלָּה, noting that “ascents” has been understood “both concretely and metaphorically.”\textsuperscript{83} He is persuaded by its particular use in reference to going up to the sanctuary. He then surveys a range of translations for מַלְמַלָּה as a phrase and concludes that the best option is “pilgrim song/gradual song,”\textsuperscript{84} which retains the original lexical ambiguity. He surveys a broad range of positions held by scholars as to what this title indicates about the collection’s intended use:\textsuperscript{85}

1. \textit{Songs for those returning from exile}, which he deems to reconstruct a history from outside the text and to extract and overemphasise individual aspects of psalms as bases for a general hypothesis.\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 187.
\textsuperscript{82} Volumes 2 (Psalms 51–100) and 3 (101–150) were completed prior to Zenger’s death. No indication of when Volume 1 (Psalms 1–50 and comprehensive introduction) will be completed has been given.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 288.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 288–93.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 288–89.
2. **Songs for the temple liturgy**, which he dismisses due to the lack of references to YHWH as king in these psalms and the absence of a “universal and theophanic horizon.”

3. **Songs for commission to sacrificial service**, which he thinks lacks foundation as the idea of sacrifice is absent in the collection, nor does the thesis explain the social dimensions present.

4. **Songs of a poetic theology of Zion**, which he admits does capture the principal themes in the collection but overlooks their strong “cultic background of origin” and therefore their primary use.

5. **Songs for the pilgrimage to Jerusalem**, which he adopts and develops.

Zenger posits that these psalms originated in temple circles as individual songs about Zion and her God, which were later taken home as “souvenirs” by pilgrims. He suggests a four-stage process for their development into a collection: some were selected from a larger group of existing “pilgrim songs,” their sequence was determined, minor redaction and expansion gave stronger coherence, and “a few” (his subsequent commentary hypotheses Pss 120, 122, 133, and 134) were written by the redactors in accordance with the theological program of their overall composition. He proposes that the purpose of the collection was to provide a book of prayers and songs that could be used both in “organized pilgrimages” and during “worship services in communities at a distance from Jerusalem, but also in family and private devotions.”

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87 Ibid., 291–92.
89 Hossfeld and Zenger, 292–93.
91 Hossfeld and Zenger, 4.
92 Zenger surveys some possible reasons for the final collection consisting of fifteen psalms, but concludes that the significance of this number is a matter for speculation.
93 Ibid., 294.
location after the Egyptian Hallel (Pss 113–118) and the great Torah Psalm (Ps 119) as giving the collection “an additional sphere of meaning,” namely that the goal of exodus is a place where the community can meditate upon the Torah. Zenger’s summary demonstrates that although scholarly debate about the title’s precise meaning continues, there is a robust consensus on a connection with pilgrimage. Issues of origin, date, and setting for the individual psalms are much more contentious, although there is general agreement that the final collection of all fifteen psalms with their shared title is post-exilic.

Redaction criticism has thus yielded a number of proposals for the origins of individual psalms in the collection but, more significantly, a general agreement that the canonical collection has been intentionally shaped for use in worship, most likely associated with pilgrimage. The strength of this coherence has continued to lead some scholars to argue for unity of composition of the Pilgrim Psalter, indicating that methodologies focused on discerning authorship and origin have led to ongoing debates without necessarily generating practicable insights for communities seeking to appropriate and use these psalms. A range of meanings has been suggested for the superscription, but the connection with pilgrimage is prevalent and is accepted as a possibility even by those who offer alternate propositions. Interpretation of the collection can benefit from consideration of the full extent of this connection, as this thesis will demonstrate.

94 Ibid., 298.
95 Ibid., 294.
96 See Leslie C. Allen, Psalms 101–150 (WBC 21; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 193–94, who also summarises the scholarship and concludes that this is certainly the broadly accepted understanding.
1.5 Liturgical/functional approaches

Some historical critical scholars working on the collection, dissatisfied with the lack of consensus on form and authorship, have focused their historical lens more specifically on the Pilgrim Psalter’s intended use and connections to Israel’s worship. Keet, an English vicar, examines what he calls the field of “Jewish liturgiology”97 to consider the collection. He assumes the collection has unity of composition and argues for a late date, thus employing his functional analysis for historical rather than theological goals. After surveying previous proposals for the title’s meaning, he proposes a connection with the festal procession rather than the widely accepted link to pilgrimage, although he acknowledges the collection’s appropriateness for both purposes.98 He relies on a brief reference to one of the psalms in the tractate Bikkurim (which records the use of Ps 122:2 in a firstfruits procession) and King’s suggestion the Psalter was read in a triennial cycle to substantiate his theory that the collection’s historical setting was the specific liturgical occasion of the firstfruits procession.99 Yet the scant evidence for his proposal suggests that the more common alternative view – pilgrimage – is preferable.

Seidel’s chapter on the collection considers psalm titles in comparison with Babylonian and Assyrian colophons, which seem to function in relation to musical practice rather than genre.100 Therefore, he considers the oft-overlooked שיר in the collection’s title to have a cultic meaning, although he accepts the most likely referent שלמה to be pilgrimage.101 After considering the genres traditionally assigned to individual psalms in the collection, he asserts that each song is essentially used as the

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98 Ibid., 17.
99 Ibid., 162.
101 Ibid., 30.
basis for further reflection and therefore suggests these psalms were spoken or preached by the Levites to pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{102} His proposal is that each psalm is thus of the same genre, what he calls a “Kurzandacht” or “Verkündigenden.”\textsuperscript{103} Although others have not followed this proposal in terms of genre analysis, it suggests the possibility of a shared function of the psalms in the collection, enabling each to be used by later communities of faith in similar ways,\textsuperscript{104} as well as reinforcing the notion of a performative use for the collection.

A number of articles by Viviers, based on his unpublished Afrikaans doctoral thesis,\textsuperscript{105} argue that there is no evidence of two layers as proposed by Seybold and instead submit that the collection contains sophisticated, unified poems that did not develop gradually.\textsuperscript{106} His analysis of words, phrases, and poetic techniques leads him to produce a schematic diagram of the collection’s structure that he names a “non-rigid chiasmus,”\textsuperscript{107} a structure that highlights the collection’s canonical harmony for those who use it. Viviers uses this evaluation to construct a single author for the collection: a Jerusalem scribe, “drenched in the cult and wisdom.”\textsuperscript{108} He then briefly considers the theology present in the collection, particularly the twin motifs of trust and lament. He contends that in all cases trust is dominant,\textsuperscript{109} although he defines trust so broadly that one wonders if this conclusion would be reached for every lament psalm in the Psalter.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[102] Ibid., 37–38.
\item[103] Ibid., 36 (“short devotional” or “proclamation”).
\item[104] This approach has most often been taken by those writing for a more popular audience, providing a reminder of the gap that often exists between academic debates and everyday Christian practice. See, for example, Gregory J. Polan, “The Pilgrim Feasts and the Songs of Ascent,” \textit{TBT} 38 (2000): 133–138, who encourages the collection’s use to help deepen Christian pilgrim identity; John S. Custer, “The Psalms of Ascent and the Journey to Pascha,” \textit{Diakonia} 25 (1992): 181–197, who considers how the Orthodox Church has used the collection in the lead up to Lent, pointing out that by definition, the collection’s inclusion in the Psalter means it was intended for later appropriation.
\item[108] Ibid.
\item[109] Viviers, “Trust and Lament,” 73.
\end{footnotes}
He concludes that as the collection as a whole is based on trust it was primarily used as a devotional or meditation book.\textsuperscript{110} His driving interest is the historical function of the collection, although his proposal raises questions about its continued and repeated use. Viviers also considers the purpose of the collection, focusing on the application of sociological and social-scientific methodologies.\textsuperscript{111} He argues religion creates, rather than merely reflects, social patterns. He mentions Geertz’s idea that religious ritual functions as a “fusion of ethos and world view, keeps faith alive and constitutes meaning,” and Brueggemann’s similar idea of the psalms as worldmaking,\textsuperscript{112} but his application of these methodologies is underdeveloped and thus his conclusion that they yield no significant insights is unsatisfactory.

Goulder, a British scholar who has made contributions to both New Testament Synoptic and Old Testament Psalms scholarship, seeks to discern the historical worship context for these psalms by comparing them with other Scriptures. He builds a strong case for the collection as a compositional unity based on features including the poems’ brevity, the centrality of Jerusalem, their “spirit of courageous hopefulness,” the disproportionate use of simile, the distinctive style of repetitions, and the Aramaic and late Hebrew forms.\textsuperscript{113} He then seeks a specific historical situation for their composition, finding it, curiously, in the story of Nehemiah. This connection provides an explanation for the title as songs of “going up” to Jerusalem from exile.\textsuperscript{114} He imagines Nehemiah giving public testimonies in celebration of his achievements, with a Levite poet

\textsuperscript{110} Hendrik Viviers, “The Coherence,” 288.

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 800.

\textsuperscript{112} Michael Douglas Goulder, “The Songs of Ascents and Nehemiah,” 47. He identifies the verb הלח as the “normal verb” Ezra and Nehemiah use to refer to the exiles’ return.
chanting a suitable response.\textsuperscript{115} These connections are provocative, but Goulder’s analysis is highly speculative and relies upon a particular redactional understanding of Nehemiah.\textsuperscript{116} His conclusion takes the proposal even further, linking the original composition with an eight-day feast celebrated in 445 BCE, three weeks after Nehemiah completed rebuilding Jerusalem’s walls. This analysis depends on what he describes as a “feeling of alternation” in Psalms 92–100. This leads to his proposal that the seventeen psalms in Book III and Book IV of the Psalter would be sufficient for eight days of evening and morning worship,\textsuperscript{117} which although intriguing lacks foundational support. His analysis of the collection’s shared features, nonetheless, indicates the rich possibilities of intra-textual analysis and he adds his voice to the consensus that pilgrimage is the most suitable prism through which to understand these psalms.

These functional treatments of the Pilgrim Psalter affirm its coherence as a collection and also highlight its performative nature, although they do so from a historical rather than theological perspective. Insights from this angle of approach will be further developed in this thesis in consideration of the use of the collection amongst later enacting communities.

1.6 Rhetorical and theological perspectives

The emergence of biblical rhetorical criticism is usually dated to James Muilenburg’s 1968 presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature, in which he diagnosed the limitations of form criticism.\textsuperscript{118} Rhetorical criticism is more interested in the style and persuasive power of Scripture, or the world of the text, than in the world behind the

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 48.
\textsuperscript{116} Goulder can also be criticised for “cherry-picking” his illustrations from the Psalms of Ascents.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 56. Goulder’s speculation veers toward the ridiculous when he mentions the “providential mnemonic” that the even numbered psalms are for evenings, which of course only works in English!
text. Although the distinctive poetry of the collection had often been noted – particularly the brevity of these psalms and their lack of classical parallelism – it had not been studied in any significant depth. To this end, Marrs’ doctoral thesis undertakes a stylistic analysis of Psalms 120–134, highlighting repetitive elements, with the dual aims of increasing appreciation for their poetry and furthering understanding of the nature of repetition in Hebrew poetry more generally.\textsuperscript{119} A number of subsequent works have examined the nature and force of Hebrew poetry more broadly\textsuperscript{120} and consequent translations of the Psalms seeking to emulate the Hebrew rhythms, syntax, force of parallelism, and other poetic features provide fertile ground for theological interpretation of the Psalms of Ascents.\textsuperscript{121}

A number of recent Psalms commentaries take a rhetorical critical approach, but many of these continue to focus on the features of individual psalms rather than considering the Psalms of Ascents as a collection. Schaefer notes that the collection was possibly a “hymnal” before its inclusion in the Psalter.\textsuperscript{122} He points out a number of recurring features within the poems of the collection, but does not discuss their significance for interpreting the Pilgrim Psalter as a whole. Terrien combines a literary focus on strophic structure with theological analysis and in light of this approach considers the Psalms of Ascents to be a unique subgenre of the temple entrance liturgy.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[121] In his commentary, Alter seeks to translate the feel, including brevity and power, of the individual psalms in the collection, but he tends to minimise any impact their location within the collection might have on their interpretation. See Robert Alter, The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 437, 460.
\item[122] Konrad Schaefer, Psalms (Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 297.
\end{footnotes}
used by pilgrims. His theological comments on the collection, though, tend to be linked to its historical setting rather than its continued use.

VanGemeren provides a more detailed discussion of psalm superscriptions than many other modern commentators, yet he includes only a brief mention of the יSetName as “a collection of songs that was probably used during the pilgrimage feasts.” His discussion on Psalm 120 notes they need not have been composed for this purpose but that in their collection it “became canonically significant,” although he does not expound on what this description means for those who later use these psalms.

Grogan similarly understands the superscriptions to be the “earliest material we possess for interpreting the psalms.” He briefly lists the superscription to the Pilgrim Psalter as its “occasion for use,” but does not undertake any further analysis of the collection as a whole or consider its particular theological profile. Brueggemann and Bellinger’s commentary considers the insights of a range of views including form-critical, functional, compositional, and sociological perspectives. They add to this a consideration of the theological import of each individual psalm. Although they accept liturgical use by pilgrims as the “most plausible” reason for the collection’s historical existence, they do not consider the theological import of this context for the collection as a whole.

In the last twenty years, there have been a wide variety of articles considering specific literary and theological aspects of the Psalms of Ascents as a collection. For example, Hunter undertakes a statistical analysis of words in the collection, compared to both Book V and the entire Psalter, to find words that are “characteristic” of the Psalms

125 Ibid., 890.
126 Geoffrey W. Grogan, Psalms (THOTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 8.
127 Ibid., 11.
of Ascents.\textsuperscript{129} These he summarises as an emphasis “on the triad of people, priesthood and royal dynasty”\textsuperscript{130} and on the “strong motif” of pilgrimage.\textsuperscript{131} He relies on the coherence of the collection established by other scholars and the “broad consensus” on its connection to pilgrimage.\textsuperscript{132} He concludes from the Pilgrim Psalter’s appearance as a collection with shared superscription in a variety of Qumran texts that it likely pre-dates the Psalter. Rather than consider the collection’s theological emphases, he employs this analysis to construct a single implied author in a late second century BCE Hasmonean context, confirming his minimalist historical assumptions.\textsuperscript{133} Nevertheless, his investigation highlights the collection’s unique theological profile, suggesting a different kind of theological interpretation might yield new insights.

Satterthwaite argues that the collection has a unifying theme, which he encapsulates as “The Restoration of Zion: YHWH’s Purposes for Her.”\textsuperscript{134} This theme is explicit in a few individual psalms, but he proposes that it “defines the underlying issues” of all the songs.\textsuperscript{135} He relies on Crow’s analysis of the collection’s unifying features and intended use, although he rejects Crow’s historical reconstruction of the poems’ origins as unnecessarily polarising and contraposing different parts of the collection.\textsuperscript{136} Satterthwaite explores the collection as five triads, which he believes gives weight to the collection’s “major progression” and takes account of continuities and contrasts between individual songs.\textsuperscript{137} From this analysis, he draws the theological

\textsuperscript{130} \textit{Ibid.}, 180.
\textsuperscript{131} \textit{Ibid.}, 181.
\textsuperscript{132} \textit{Ibid.}, 173.
\textsuperscript{133} \textit{Ibid.}, 182–83.
\textsuperscript{135} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{136} \textit{Ibid.}, 112–13.
\textsuperscript{137} \textit{Ibid.}, 117.
conclusion that Zion is the focus of YHWH’s purposes for the future, which comprise an inclusive vision of Israel and the welfare of both Israel and individual Israelites.\(^{138}\)

Barker notes the dominance of the idea of pilgrimage in the imagery of faith from ancient to modern times. He sees a consensus in recent scholarship that the superscription means “Songs of Pilgrimage,” whether referring to the journey to Jerusalem for annual feasts, ceremonial ascent to the temple, or ascent to Jerusalem by returning exiles.\(^{139}\) He accepts a post-exilic date for the collection’s final form due to specific references in Psalms 125 and 126 and its placement in Book V, but believes each individual psalm had an original context and purpose dating back much further.\(^{140}\) He sees “some kind of progression” from beginning to end in the collection but acknowledges this progression is neither simple nor linear.\(^{141}\) Contrary to Viviers, Barker sees lament as the “dominating voice” of the collection\(^{142}\) and uses Brueggemann’s ideas of disorientation and reorientation\(^{143}\) to explore how dislocation is part of the pilgrimage experience.

Prinsloo observes that the Psalms of Ascents were interpreted as a collection long before the recent focus on setting individual psalms within the shape of the Psalter.\(^{144}\) He is content to rely upon previous scholarship to outline the collection’s features\(^{145}\) and believes “inadequate attention has been paid to the ‘story’ of the טְיוֹם הַמֵּתָלָה.”\(^{146}\) His goal is to study its progression through the “theologically

\(^{138}\) Ibid., 127–28.
\(^{140}\) Ibid.
\(^{141}\) Ibid.
\(^{142}\) Ibid., 112.
\(^{143}\) This idea is found in many of Brueggemann’s works, but Barker, 113, identifies Walter Brueggemann, Praying the Psalms (Winona, Minnesota: Saint Mary’s Press, 1989) as “one of the most passionate and poignant.”
\(^{145}\) Prinsloo names in particular Zenger, Crow, and Willi.
\(^{146}\) Prinsloo, “The Role of Space,” 457.
meaningful pattern” provided by the concept of space, a concept from the field of narratology that emphasises the dimensions in which a story is situated and the way these contribute to the psychological perception it creates. He notes that the Hebrew Bible brings different spaces together and the temple in Jerusalem in particular becomes the meeting point between the concrete and mythological worlds. Therefore to be far from the temple is to be far from YHWH. Prinsloo asserts that this is one of the most important concepts in the Psalms of Ascents, referenced in every individual poem. He retells the “story” of the collection with this spatial perspective in mind, looking at the psalms in five groups of three, and even diagrammatically plots the “spatial map” of the Psalms of Ascents (see Image 1.2 below). In my view, this interpretation has potential for shaping a theological understanding of the collection’s intended impact on those who enact it and the idea of spatiality is considered in light of the methodologies adopted in this thesis (see section 5.3.3 below). Conversely, Prinsloo uses these findings to draw a historical conclusion about the collection’s author, considering the poet’s self-presentation, his preoccupations with Jerusalem and with Israel as the people of God, and the explicit mentions of David. Based on his own previous psalm analysis, he identifies “a group of Levites who has been expelled from their privileged position in the temple by the post-exilic temple aristocracy late in the Persian period.”

147 Ibid., 458–59.
148 Ibid., 460–61.
150 Prinsloo, “The Role of Space,” 476.
Gillmayr-Bucher follows Prinsloo in looking at images of space within the collection.\textsuperscript{152} She focuses on two sets of images – Jerusalem/Zion and home/family – explaining them through the perspective of the centre and the margins. She observes that the relationship of a person to the centre depends on their orientation to it rather than their location.\textsuperscript{153} The margins of space are initially defined by Gillmayr-Bucher as the “dangerous” places represented physically by Meshech and Kedar (Ps 120) and theologically by the “depths” (Ps 130).\textsuperscript{154} She brings together a wide range of images under the heading “space,” including body imagery and people as space, and provides enlightening descriptions. Her insights are also considered (see section 5.3.3 below) in light of the performance methodology employed by this thesis.

Ventura’s 2008 publication of her doctoral thesis, titled \textit{Cuerpos Peregrinos} ("Pilgrim Bodies"), seeks to demonstrate that the twin themes of oppression and resistance form a consistent thread throughout the Pilgrim Psalter. Writing as a black

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 474.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 497.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 490.
Latin American woman, she is particularly interested in issues of gender, race, and class and their intersection with social, political, economic, and religious realities. She thus examines these psalms not only as theological texts but also as “representaciones simbólicas” of the collective consciousness of these realities. Examining the text through these lenses, she identifies the collection’s use of bodily movement, speech, behaviour, and memory as significant instruments through which oppression and resistance are expressed. Accepting the consensus that the collection is a “cancionero” for pilgrimage to Jerusalem, she notes the diverse authors and historical contexts of the individual psalms. In the collection as a whole, she seeks to determine echoes of power differentials and struggles in the post-exilic context and thereby allow the text to engage in “dialogar con experiencias de opresión de mujeres, en especial negras e indígenas, a través de la historia latinoamericana y caribeña.” Ventura’s work springs from her particular context and interest but is particularly useful in pointing out anthropological and theological perspectives present in the text that “first world” readers might otherwise overlook. Although the themes of oppression and resistance do not appear to be as dominant as she proposes, they are certainly present in these psalms and such a perspective needs to be acknowledged. Her emphasis on the prominence of body imagery, speech, and memory in the collection lends weight to the argument of this thesis that embodiment plays a significant role in the interpretation of these texts (see section 2.4.5.3 below).

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155 Tirsa Ventura, Cuerpos Peregrinos: Un estudio de la opresión y la resistencia desde el género, clase y etnia en los Salmos 120 al 134 (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Departamento Ecuménico de Investigaciones, 2008), 362 (“symbolic representations”).
156 Ibid., 370.
157 Ibid., 16 (“songbook”).
158 See ibid., 377.
159 Ibid., 384 (“dialogue with the experiences of women who have been oppressed, especially black women throughout Latin American and Caribbean history”).
160 For example, her translation of the noun בְּתָנָה (“distress”) in the opening verse of the collection as “oppression” appears to lack foundational support.
These diverse rhetorical and theological studies of the collection evidence a not insignificant consensus for associating Psalms 120–134 with pilgrimage and underline various specific structural and thematic intra-textual elements that support this connection. It remains the case, however, that such discussions have often been used in aid of conclusions about the Pilgrim Psalter’s historical setting or authorship, rather than used to consider its function and effect as it continues to be enacted by communities of faith. Furthermore, a number of these treatments apply broader literary theories to the collection – perhaps because its well-delimited boundaries provide a manageable scope – rather than pursuing ideas that emerge from a close reading of the text and its theological and performative dimensions.

1.7 Canonical and compositional perspectives

Some recent rhetorical treatments of the collection have been influenced by another key shift in Psalms – and more broadly, biblical – scholarship: the emergence of canonical and/or compositional criticism. Brevard Childs is credited with introducing canonical criticism to Old Testament studies, emphasising the final form of the text and the community’s shaping of the canon (see section 2.3.2 below). Psalms scholarship has particularly been influenced by the work of Childs’ student, Gerald Wilson, who proposed that the book as a whole has been edited as a literary composition with a theological purpose. His work has led to renewed emphasis on the five books of the Psalter and to reading the book as a whole.

162 Wilson, The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter.
163 For example, Howard N. Wallace, Psalms (Readings; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009), seeks to read the Psalter holistically as a book, specifically from the perspective of David. His perfunctory comments on the Psalms of Ascents, however, provide little evidence of how this approach could provide a distinctive interpretation to the collection.
Compositional approaches have also produced a proliferation of recent scholarship seeking to consider particular psalms in light of their location within the Psalter. In this vein, Nielsen tackles the location of the Psalms of Ascents immediately after Psalm 119.\textsuperscript{164} She is interested in Crow’s idea of redactors making what she calls “propaganda” for pilgrimage, as she contends it would suggest a lack of consensus at the time about the importance of the practice.\textsuperscript{165} The Qumran manuscript 11QPs\textsuperscript{3} separates Psalms 133–134 from the rest of the collection and Nielsen uses Millard’s proposal that this was done deliberately by a group who rejected the temple and pilgrimage to assert that the maintenance of the current order in the MT deliberately juxtaposes Torah and pilgrimage as “two ways of life.”\textsuperscript{166} Her argument is a non sequitur, however, as it assumes that a lack of change has an affirmative purpose. A stronger argument for deliberate placement of the two texts, which she believes can be understood as “text[s] in dialogue”\textsuperscript{167} is found in Nielsen’s description of Psalm 119’s theme, “to walk according to the Torah.”\textsuperscript{168} She points out the many metaphors for walking and journeying in the Torah Psalm, which are suggestive when compared to pilgrimage as the theme of the collection. Nielsen’s hypothesis is that the Psalter’s redactors wanted it to be relevant to various groups and therefore “kept different points of view within the same book.”\textsuperscript{169} This runs counter to the more usual understanding of redaction as seeking to impose a particular theological framework or “shape” on the book. She posits that these psalms provide alternative answers to a “burning question” of the diaspora: whether it was necessary to make pilgrimage to Jerusalem. She provides no evidence, however, that this was indeed a prominent question.

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., 62.
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid. “Dialogue” is perhaps too modern a notion for what she is referring to.
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., 63.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 64.
Booij seeks to connect the collection to the subsequent Psalms 135–136 and then connects all seventeen psalms historically with a great pilgrimage festival. He provides a detailed survey of the most common interpretations of the title, naming as “a reasonable assumption” the linking of the phrase with pilgrimage, but reports that there are no examples of singing pilgrims in the Old Testament text. He prefers, therefore, to understand as “procession song” because processions were known to be accompanied by music and singing. He imagines the use of Psalms 120–134 in a procession to Jerusalem and Psalms 135–136 upon arrival in the temple. He speculates from a Talmudic Passover meal reference linking verses from the collection to the “Great Hallel” that it was most likely used at a festival, probably Sukkoth because of the night celebrations and the timing of the ark’s arrival in Jerusalem, but he does not deal with arguments made by others against the weight given to this reference.

Against the tide of compositional treatments, Rohde’s primary aims are to dispute the view that the Psalms of Ascents present a Zion-theology and to counter the recent focus on reading the Psalms as a book with a reminder that exegesis of individual psalms remains indispensable. He makes some helpful observations on the collection’s theological profile by considering the perspective of the speaker, the occurrences of motifs, the terms used for the audience, and the theological emphases of the pictures used. He maintains many individual psalms do not refer to Zion or do so

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171 This is, of course, an argument from silence. There are no examples of non-singing pilgrims in the Old Testament text either.

172 Booij, “Psalms 120–136,” 246.


illustratively or metaphorically, but his dismissal of clear references to Zion as mere “ciphers” intimates an inclination to overstate his case.\textsuperscript{176}

The recent emphasis on the final form of the biblical text affirms the importance of considerations of the canonical location and setting of psalms within the Psalter. Nielsen and Booij have considered the Psalms of Ascents in terms of their location after Psalm 119 and before Psalms 135–136 respectively. A number of commentators have considered more broadly the significance of their location within Book V of the Psalter.\textsuperscript{177} A canonical analysis of the collection itself, particularly read theologically in light of its common superscription, has not yet been undertaken. This thesis fills that gap.

\section*{1.8 Conclusions}

From this survey of scholarship it can be concluded that Psalms 120–134 have been recognised as a distinct collection throughout their history of interpretation.\textsuperscript{178} There have been a variety of understandings of the meaning and purpose of their shared superscription, but a broad consensus has developed connecting it to the idea of pilgrimage.\textsuperscript{179} Analyses of the origins and editing of the collection have yielded no firm consensus and continue to provoke debate, particularly for those who take a strong position on the historicity of the Old Testament. The difficulty in reaching agreement on dating can also be viewed as an inevitable consequence of the deliberate de-historicisation of psalms in their canonical framework as a collection,\textsuperscript{180} thus favouring a

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid., 38.
\textsuperscript{177} See, for example, Goulder, \textit{The Psalms of the Return}, especially 17, 27–28; Hossfeld and Zenger, 4–5.
\textsuperscript{178} With the sole exception of Pss 133–134 in 11QPs\textsuperscript{a}.
\textsuperscript{179} Post-exile, it is quite likely that pilgrimage also evokes the return.
\textsuperscript{180} All psalms in the book have been deliberately de-contextualised from their history, but this is seen even more strongly with this group of psalms by bringing them together into this collection.
\end{flushright}
theological interpretation rather than the historical approaches that have been commonly taken to these Scriptures.

Form critical approaches make clear that the psalms in this collection do not easily fit the classical psalm genres and that the possibility of as a sub-genre itself has not been fully explored. More recent literary and theological approaches, despite being fragmentary and generally disconnected, affirm that the collection has a unity beyond the shared superscription – in form, overall structure and drama, and theological emphases – and provide further impetus for sustained theological study of the collection as a whole.

Areas of research that have not yet been thoroughly examined thus include the significance of the canonical superscription of the Psalms of Ascents for how the collection is interpreted theologically, the performative aspects of the Psalms of Ascents, and the connections between these, the superscription, and the collection’s intended use by communities of faith. The theological connection between these psalms and the metaphor of pilgrimage for faith itself has been hinted at by a number of scholars but not pursued.181 These are all explored thoroughly in this thesis. This thesis seeks to draw on the insights of previous scholarship, accepting the broad consensus that the superscription relates to pilgrimage. It also takes note of the inherently performative nature of these “songs.” The title is therefore considered as a canonical frame for the collection, providing a hermeneutical lens for translation, performance, and theological interpretation of the Psalms of Ascents.

181 See, for example, William P. Brown, Psalms (IBT; Nashville: Abingdon, 2010), 97, who says, “Regardless of whether they were actually used by pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem, these psalms transport the reader to the source of shalom—individual, familial, and national. They offer an ascent, a destination, to the fount of all blessing.” Pilgrimage (or more broadly, journey) has also been used as a metaphor for the experience of reading the Psalter itself. For example, William H. Bellinger Jr., Psalms: A Guide to Studying the Psalter (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 3–4, uses this metaphor to explain the function of the Psalter and in this connection remarks that there is a collection of pilgrimage psalms, but never returns to discuss the collection.
Chapter 2: Methodologies

2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the theoretical and methodological frameworks that guide the work undertaken in this thesis, exploring areas of research identified in the review of previous scholarship on the Psalms of Ascents in Chapter 1. This thesis seeks to integrate three perspectives: theological interpretation, which is the overarching goal of this study; a canonical approach, which determines both the limits of the text chosen for study and the hermeneutical lens through which it is read and enacted; and a performance-critical methodology, describing the process undertaken in translating, memorising, performing, and reflecting on performance of the text. Each of these perspectives focuses on both the nature of the text and the effect the text has on the community of faith.

The Psalms of Ascents provide a suitable text for this exploration due to their canonical presentation as a collection, their shared superscription connecting them to the idea of pilgrimage, and the absence in these songs of the strong theological statements found elsewhere in the Psalter, suggesting a more subtle theological presentation. This analysis seeks to hear the distinctive theological voice of the collection and, as such, draws more from the tradition of biblical, rather than systematic, theology. Thus it presents a theology that is by nature partial and provisional. This thesis seeks to explore Brueggemann’s suggestion that the psalms are “worldmaking” and therefore uses a canonical-theological-performance-critical perspective to explore

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182 For example, many of the key metaphors for YHWH found through the Psalter, including הַמֶּלֶךְ (king), הַרוּחַ (rock), and מִשְׁגָּד (refuge), do not appear in the Psalms of Ascents.
how a community’s enactment of these psalms can do more than merely redescribe reality, but can re-enact or reconstruct it.

2.2 Theological interpretation of Scripture

2.2.1 Introduction

The biblical text has been read and understood theologically by communities of faith for millennia. Biblical scholars have also used methods of biblical interpretation that have theological motivations and goals. In the last twenty years, however, a group of scholars have explicitly used the description “theological interpretation of Scripture” to designate a particular approach in biblical studies. Theological interpretation of Scripture is generally agreed to be a perspective or approach to the biblical text rather than a methodology, though it is developing a range of methodological preferences. It is understood to involve a particular set of commitments and practices.184

Theological interpretation is not a hermeneutical method or exegetical tool in the ways that redaction criticism or form criticism, for example, are methods.185 Nor is it simply about identifying the theological truths contained in – or doctrines derived from – a text.186 Fundamentally, theological interpretation seeks to find a hermeneutical framework to interpret the biblical text that takes the distinctive theological character of those texts seriously. It addresses the question: “How might the fact that this is a body

185 Murray Rae, “Response: Reading as Formation,” in Green and Meadowcroft, Ears That Hear: 258–262, 258.
of texts which presents itself as one within which we expect in a unique way to hear the voice of God, impact the way we handle that text?”

2.2.2 Development and rationale

Theological interpretation of Scripture has developed in response to a number of factors, including the ostensible gap between theology and biblical studies in the academy, dissatisfaction with the seemingly meagre fruits of historical-critical methods, and a focus on the nature of the biblical text itself.

A major impetus for the development of theological interpretation has been the “cleavage” between biblical studies and systematic theology. Protestant biblical scholars have tended to focus on historical-critical and literary methods, leaving theological perspectives to the separate discipline of theology. A number of attempts have been made to bridge this divide under the banner of “biblical theology,” a term which needs to be carefully distinguished from “theological interpretation of Scripture,” despite some writers using the two interchangeably. There is also great diversity in how “biblical theology” has been understood and practiced in its various iterations. Klink and Lockett provide a taxonomy that distinguishes five different types of biblical theology: as historical description, history of redemption, worldview-story, canonical approach, and theological construction. Biblical theology is here understood to refer to a theological enterprise that seeks to identify and describe the concepts or ideas

187 Meadowcroft, 3.
behind biblical texts,\textsuperscript{191} usually looking at the Hebrew Bible or Scripture as a whole, whereas theological interpretation of Scripture is a biblical studies-based approach, which can consider individual texts and how they contribute to our theological understanding. The two can be held in productive tension where they remain separate but mutually inform one another.

Theological interpretation of Scripture has also developed in response to perceived shortcomings in critical biblical scholarship, particularly the perceived treatment of texts as pieces of evidence for historical questions.\textsuperscript{192} It is suggested that the biblical text has too often been treated as a source for reconstructing history, whereas its primary emphasis according to proponents of theological interpretation is on testifying to the presence and action of God within history.\textsuperscript{193} Theological interpretation is therefore interested in what Scripture means for the community of faith – past, present, and future – and what that community should say, think, and embody about God.\textsuperscript{194} Its proponents should be careful not to disparage the valuable contribution of biblical scholars from a range of historical approaches,\textsuperscript{195} many of whom have ultimately sought to use their historical critical scholarship for theological ends, and it can in fact build on the fruits of their critical methods.

Theological interpretation of Scripture is also considered to do justice to the nature of the text itself. As Rae affirms: “There is a prima facie case in favor of the prayerful, theological reading of Scripture established by the content of the biblical texts

\textsuperscript{192} Fowl, Theological Interpretation of Scripture, 19–20. See also Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method (trans. Joel Weisheimer and Douglas Marshall; Revised second edition; London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 344–45. The development of literary approaches to Scripture such as that of Robert Alter and Shimon Bar-Efrat appears to be tied to similar concerns.
\textsuperscript{195} See Treier, 199.
Theological interpreters self-consciously seek to allow the way they interpret Scripture to be influenced by how they think about what Scripture is. Attention is paid to the text’s intention to shape readers. The underpinning rationale for theological interpretation is the claim that the Bible is an act of divine self-communication and thus reading a text theologically is reading it “on the terms of its own biblical presentation.”

Theological interpretation should not be seen as a replacement for other methods of biblical interpretation but rather as providing an additional perspective. This is particularly so because theological interpretation generally adopts an indeterminate approach to meaning. A determinate approach would propose that a text has a single meaning and thus the goal of interpretation is to find or discover that meaning, whereas a completely antideterminate approach would allow for an unlimited number of meanings. Most theological interpreters attempt to walk a middle path, recognising “a plurality of interpretive practices and results, without necessarily granting epistemological priority to any of these.” At the same time, possible constructions of a text are limited by its form and context. Different interpretive practices can and must co-exist and do not need to claim to replace all other methods or to be the only way to

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198 Fowl, *Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 33.  
199 Treier, 85.  
201 Allan Bell, “Interpreting the Bible on Language: Babel and Ricoeur’s Interpretive Arc,” in Green and Meadowcroft, *Ears That Hear*: 70–93, 78.
find meaning. Theological interpretation is thus complementary rather than
contradictory to other approaches.\textsuperscript{202}

Theological interpretation of Scripture is not a homogeneous movement; rather,
there are areas of divergence including how to use the fruits of historical critical
scholarship, the place of authorial intention, and the best methodological approaches to
apply. Diversity in theological interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in particular centres
on how to read it “Christianly.” Although for some this means a focus on typology and
reading the Old Testament entirely backwards through the lens of the New Testament,
this thesis takes seriously the danger warned of by Brueggemann, among others, that in
so doing the polyphony and rough edges of the Hebrew Bible can too easily be
smoothed over. Rather, attention is paid to the Hebrew Bible’s discrete witness to the
character and action of God, a productive and appropriate source for Christian
theological reflection in and of itself.\textsuperscript{203}

\textbf{2.2.3 Criticisms}

Theological interpretation has been criticised for lacking precision\textsuperscript{204} and an
inexactitude can certainly be seen in some of the varied approaches. As it is a relatively
new and emerging discipline, greater clarity should emerge in the future. There is also a
deliberate muddiness in descriptions of theological interpretation due in part to a fear of
pinning the approach down too precisely and thereby leaving no room for the very thing
it seeks to allow space for – the unexpected, unpredictable voice of God.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item See Miriam J. Bier, “Theological Interpretation and the Book of Lamentations: A Polyphonic
Reconsideration,” in Green and Meadowcroft, \textit{Ears That Hear}; 204–222, 219, who applies the idea that
texts can be polyphonic works rather than needing to be pinned down to a single controlling discourse.
\item See Christopher R. Seitz, \textit{The Character of Christian Scripture: The Significance of a Two-Testament
Bible} (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 90, 138. See also Ellen T. Charry, \textit{Psalms 1–50: Sighs and
Songs of Israel} (Brazos; Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2015), xix–xx.
\item See William P. Brown, “Theological Interpretation: A Proposal,” in \textit{Method Matters: Essays on the
Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honour of David L. Petersen} (ed. Joel M. LeMon and Kent Harold
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Theological interpretation of Scripture has also been criticised for spending too much time explaining what it is not and for discussing preparatory methodological issues without demonstrating its benefits in practice. This thesis attempts to respond to these criticisms by showing a particular kind of theological interpretation applied to specific texts (the Psalms of Ascents), rather than spending too much time on “methodological throat-cleaning.”

Some theological interpreters can also be critiqued for overstating their case at times, implying that what they are doing is radically innovative and that all historical critical scholars have been uninterested in the text’s impact on the community of faith. Similarly, theological interpretation of the Old Testament by Christian scholars in particular runs the risk of inattentiveness toward the text’s place within the Jewish community of faith.

Barton criticises theological interpretation as a form of eisegesis, arguing that questions of belief and truth should be “bracketed out” to ascertain meaning. He submits that proponents of theological interpretation allow their prior theological commitments to control their exegesis and therefore determine meaning. Certainly this is a danger of which to be wary, but Barton’s examples demonstrate correlation rather than causation. The goal of theological interpretation is not to predetermine meaning, but to read the text in light of its theological character and to allow theology to be shaped and changed by it. All practitioners of theological interpretation of Scripture – and indeed any interpretive approach – need to remain vigilant to the temptation to practice interpretation in a way that reinforces their own biases and/or power. Thus it is

206 See Donald A. Carson, “Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Yes, But ...,” in Theological Commentary: Evangelical Perspectives (ed. Michael Allen; London: T & T Clark, 2011): 187–207, 192, who believes some proponents of theological interpretation have fostered “a clash between theology and history [that] is in danger of approaching the issues with a meat cleaver when a scalpel is needed.”
essential for the theological interpreter of the biblical text to acknowledge their own location, lest its strength of openness and creativity become its greatest weakness. For this thesis, my own location as an Australian, Protestant (Baptist), female pastor no doubt influences the perspective and approach taken, even as I seek to allow the text to shape interpretation (see section 4.3.4 below).

2.2.4 Key elements

Key elements of theological interpretation of Scripture include considering the church as the primary context for biblical interpretation, seeking to discern the voice of God through the text as its key practice, and viewing the transformation of God’s people as its ultimate goal. These are considered in turn, noting that they overlap significantly with key themes emerging in biblical performance criticism (see section 2.4.5 below). A noteworthy antecedent to theological interpretation of Scripture, pre-critical exegesis, seen by some proponents as a fourth key element, is also briefly considered below.

2.2.4.1 Location: Community of faith

Green defines theological interpretation by its “self-consciously ecclesial location.”

Theological interpretation seeks to serve the church, who as the gathered community of God’s people are understood to best define the practices and ultimate aims of biblical interpretation, rather than the academy. Theological interpretation is thus an activity both by and for the church. The church is the community called by Scripture to discern the meaning of Scripture, as well as the community Scripture seeks to direct and transform. Interpreting Scripture in community is also understood as a potential

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209 Green, Practicing Theological Interpretation, 5.
210 Treier, 150–51. Carson, 203–4, perhaps fairly criticises the movement for claiming to speak for the church whilst largely remaining the work of scholars within the academy.
safeguard against an individual exegete reading their biases into the text. Discovering communal approaches to interpretation is a challenge in an individualistic culture, but the involvement of the community as “audience” in performances of the text offers one such possible approach and is explored in detail in this thesis.

2.2.4.2 Practice: Discerning divine discourse

Vanhoozer defines theological interpretation as “reading the Bible to hear the word of God ... to discern the divine discourse in the canonical work.”  

This explanation again takes into account the nature of Scripture, in particular its internal claim to convey divine self-communication. Thus theological interpreters come to Scripture with a presupposition that in it the community of faith is addressed by the voice of God and they therefore seek to hear that voice. This is one of the reasons for the methodological diversity to be found within the broader movement of theological interpretation, as we “should not be surprised that the viva vox Dei is not beholden to precisely specified methods of interpretation.”

2.2.4.3 Goal: Community transformation

For the theological interpreter, interpretation is not an end in itself. Scripture is read and heard so that the interpreter might be transformed. The goals of biblical interpretation are thus the goals of the Christian life and there is a dimension of devotion brought to the activity of biblical interpretation.  

In this way, theological interpretation is constructive rather than merely descriptive, allowing the text to shape, inform, and

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212 Rae, “Theological Interpretation,” 25.
213 See ibid., 23; Bell, 88; Treier, 43.
challenge the interpreter. Faithful interpretation is ultimately demonstrated not by a written account of what a text means but “by lives lived in accordance with the reality to which Scripture testifies.” The goal of interpretation is what Ricoeur calls “appropriation.”

2.2.4.4 Antecedents: Precritical exegesis

The heightened awareness of the practical outworking of Scripture has led to an attentiveness amongst some proponents of theological interpretation of Scripture to the practice of other interpreters who are understood to have had a similar mindset, often named as “premodern” or “precritical” interpreters. The use of these terms reflects our own location, as both designations seek to subsume hundreds of years of scholarship from a variety of locations under one heading. What the terms have in common is a perception that these older interpreters included a perspective that modern biblical scholarship has lacked. For many centuries, Christian interpretation of Scripture was intrinsically theological in the sense that it was assumed that to interpret Scripture was to encounter God. Interpretations were valued by whether they made God known and were able to transform people into God’s image. Many of the key features of patristic exegesis noted by Daley echo the elements of theological interpretation articulated above. Due to these kinds of overlaps, for some theological interpreters a key aim has become recovering or imitating precritical practices. Not all precritical exegesis, however, is exemplary or useful. Nor is it possible – or desirable – to turn back the

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214 Brown, “Theological Interpretation: A Proposal,” 389. See also Charry, xxv, who observes that this aligns with the Psalms’ intention to shape later readers.
215 Rae, “Response,” 260.
217 See Treier, 42. Fowl, Theological Interpretation of Scripture, 16, names this as the priority granted to theological concerns over historical ones.
219 Treier, 40. See for example, Byassee.
clock and pretend that the contributions of modern biblical scholarship have not occurred. Hence a more mature approach, adopted here, is to learn from premodern exegetes an orientation toward the text, understanding that spiritual participation in the text’s work can in fact aid understanding, whilst at the same time embracing the benefits of modern scholarship.

2.2.5 Appropriate methods

Although theological interpretation of Scripture allows room for a diversity of methodological practices in interpreting texts, there are hermeneutical tools that are particularly well suited to its goals. Four are examined here: close reading of the text, approaches that focus on the nature of the text, the exploration of key theological ideas, and the idea of “worldmaking” as a descriptor of the text’s theological effect.

2.2.5.1 Close reading of the text

Vanhoozer observes three different approaches to theological interpretation: those that focus on the divine author, those that focus on the ideological concerns of the interpretive community, and those that focus on the text as a theological witness.220 He favours the third option, a text-focused approach, as does this thesis. Although the perspective and location of the interpreter must be acknowledged, primary attention is paid to the theological features embedded in the Psalms of Ascents themselves.

The theological interpretation undertaken in this thesis thus begins with careful exegetical work, utilising the tools of textual criticism, grammatical and syntactical analysis, and lexical study.221 Such close reading of the text provides a foundation from

221 See Brown, “Theological Interpretation: A Proposal,” 389. See also Bell and Rae’s chapters in Green and Meadowcroft, Ears That Hear, as examples of theological interpretations that begin with a close reading of the text.
which theological insights can be discovered, as well as functioning as a critical safeguard against reading one’s own interests into the text.

2.2.5.2 Approaches that focus on the nature of the text

Theological interpretations emphasise not only the meanings of texts, but also their form and function.\(^{222}\) As well as self-consciously assuming the text to be a vehicle of divine communication, a theological interpretation thereby considers the text as authoritative for the community of faith and thus a canonical approach is particularly well suited to be employed for theological ends. In terms of the Psalms of Ascents, this means reading them not only as part of the canon of Scripture, but also taking seriously their canonical location and framing as a collection with a shared superscription. The canonical-theological approach taken in this interpretation of the Pilgrim Psalter is outlined in section 2.3 below. Furthermore, the nature or function of psalms as ritual/liturgical texts intended for enactment by communities of faith is significant, as a theological interpretation seeks to discern the nature of faithful enactments or performances of the text.\(^{223}\) An approach that takes this aspect seriously and seeks to interpret these psalms in light of their performative nature is therefore also most appropriate when seeking to interpret these texts theologically. Thus a performance-critical methodology is also employed in this thesis, as outlined in section 2.4 below.

2.2.5.3 Exploration of key theological ideas

Although theological interpretation does not typically follow a step-by-step method but rather adopts a more creative and imaginative approach, it has a particular interest in focusing on the text’s reasoning about God and the world. Brown’s proposal for a


\(^{223}\) See Treier, 148–49.
method in theological interpretation poses two key questions of the text’s exegetical contours and contexts. First, he considers the text’s “theo-logic”:\textsuperscript{224} what can be ascertained from it about God’s character and relationship to the world. Secondly, he considers the text’s “cosmo-logic”: what can be ascertained from the text about the world itself including its relationship to God and humanity’s place within it.\textsuperscript{225} He uses these terms in particular (rather than “theology” or “cosmology”) to indicate that there is not a systematic theology suspended above the text which the interpreter imposes upon it, but rather that the text itself has embedded within it a way of inscribing the world. Brown’s broad questions provide a helpful way of considering the text from different perspectives and are adopted in this thesis, although his second question is divided into two, with a separate consideration of cosmo-logic, the world inscribed by the text, and anthropo-logic, the understanding of humanity inscribed in the text. Thus Chapters 5–8 of this thesis consider a canonical-theological and performative approach to the Psalms of Ascents with these three particular perspectives woven together. First, this includes an examination of their anthropo-logic, paying attention to their immediately apparent “quotidian” nature,\textsuperscript{226} with multiple references to family and agricultural images, as well an emphasis on the communal life of Israel. Secondly, the nature of the world depicted in these psalms, with their numerous references to geographical features as well as \textit{\textit{הָרֹאשׁ}}, is considered under the heading of cosmo-logic. Thirdly, interwoven with this is an exploration of both the explicit and implicit presentation of \textit{YHWH} in the collection under the rubric of theo-logic. These are drawn together under the heading of “worldmaking” to consider the overall effect these psalms can have in reshaping the reality of those who enact them.

\textsuperscript{224} Hans Urs von Balthasar’s three volume work \textit{Theo-Logic} uses the same term but in a slightly different way.
\textsuperscript{225} Brown, “Theological Interpretation: A Proposal,” 390.
\textsuperscript{226} The term is from David Kelsey, \textit{Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology} (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 190, 213, etc., who uses it for God’s involvement in ordinary life.
2.2.5.4 "Worldmaking” as descriptor of the text’s theological effect

The term “worldmaking” is adopted from Walter Brueggemann, who uses it for what psalms do, based on the idea that language functions to reshape and reconstruct reality. His idea of worldmaking begins by returning to Mowinckel’s contribution to Psalms scholarship, focusing on the second fascicle of his Psalmenstudien, “The Festival of the Enthronement of Yahweh and the Origin of Eschatology.” Brueggemann argues that the first half of this title has been the subject of immense discussion but the second half has been overlooked. Mowinckel suggested there was an appropriate emphasis on eschatological expectations in the cult because the cult is an act of “liturgic imagination” which is open to an alternative future.227 Brueggemann proposes that the details of Mowinckel’s hypothesis are less important than its basic claim that the cult is an act of world construction.228 Brueggemann then marshals contemporary voices from a range of disciplines to confirm that the idea germinated by Mowinckel is worth pursuing, identifying four areas in current intellectual discourse that illuminate his proposal – social,229 literary,230 psychological,231 and theological232 – each of which affirms that the world is formed, shaped, and constructed.233 Brueggemann’s key argument is therefore that the act of praise is constitutive or worldmaking.234 His discussion is nominally limited to “praise,” although at times he uses that word interchangeably with

227. Brueggemann, Israel’s Praise, 5. He observes that most criticisms of Mowinckel have focused on his specific proposal of an annual enthronement festival, rather than on these broader ideas.
228. Ibid., 6.
233. Brueggemann, Israel's Praise, 25.
234. Ibid., 160. Wright’s recent work on the Psalms makes a similar argument, that singing and praying the Psalms draws us “into a world” to “inhabit and celebrate it.” N. T. Wright, The Case for the Psalms: Why They Are Essential (New York: Harper One, 2013), 22.
“psalms.”

This social reality is also a dramatic reality so that psalms are “always to be enacted again,” a dimension that he feels has been overlooked by those who predominantly study the Psalms from historical perspectives. Brueggemann argues that worship is unavoidably constructive and that this has a “substantive theological dimension.”

Brueggemann does not carefully define his use of the term “world,” a word used by a variety of scholars in numerous ways. Notably, Ricoeur speaks of three worlds: the world behind the text, the world of the text, and the world in front of the text. Although this is a helpful heuristic, it would be incorrect to think that this thesis is concerned with only one of these worlds. Worldmaking is here construed instead as the dynamic process by which the community of faith has the world in which they currently live reframed by their enactment of the text, or to use Ricoeur’s terminology, the way the world of the text shapes the world in front of the text.

Brueggemann provides a brief example of how worldmaking can be applied to a small group of psalms in *Abiding Astonishment*, where he attempts to articulate the way the historical psalms (Pss 78, 105, 106, and 136) reshape the world for those who read them faithfully. He summarises the reshaped world enacted by these psalms of historical recital as “intergenerational, covenantally shaped, morally serious, dialogically open, and politically demanding.” The “collection” of psalms he has chosen to consider is determined based on modern critical analysis, however, rather

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235 He also at times uses “enthronement psalms” as well. See, for example, *Israel’s Praise*, 65. His language is also unclear at times when talking about the worldmaking role of the “liturgy” and of the “psalms,” again using the terms interchangeably without clarification. See, for example, *ibid.*., 68.


237 *Ibid.*., 158.

238 See, for example, Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 87–94.


than on canonical presentation. To date, Brueggemann’s consideration of the Psalms of Ascents has been only as individual psalms in his commentary or under his broader headings of orientation, reorientation, and disorientation. Thus Brueggemann’s term worldmaking is here applied to the Pilgrim Psalter as an overarching descriptor for the effect the text has on those who enter into it and allow it to reshape the theological realities of their community and lives.

2.3 A canonical-theological approach

2.3.1 Introduction

One of the approaches appropriate for theological interpretation of Scripture that takes seriously the nature of Scripture is a “canonical” approach. The authors and editors of Scripture treated this literature as distinct from other literature, thereby implicitly making ultimate claims on the community who read it, and a canonical approach takes this fact seriously. To read the text as canon is to read it expecting to hear the voice of God.

As canon ... Scripture needs to be read fittingly, in the particular ways and with the particular virtues that are appropriate to the nature of Scripture as the church’s given norm, and that serve the end of Scripture, which is the instruction and edification of the saints.

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241 This might be because he does not accept the superscriptions as “historically accurate,” although he does agree with Childs that they are “interpretive clues” for how to read the psalms. Walter Brueggemann, “Psalms in Narrative Performance,” in Performing the Psalms (ed. David Fleer and Dave Bland, St Louis: Chalice, 2005): 9–29, 20.

242 For example, in Walter Brueggemann, The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), he briefly examines Psalms 131 and 133 as “occasion of well-being” under the category of orientation, Psalm 130 as one of the seven penitential psalms under disorientation, and Psalm 124 as a “thanksgiving of the community” under psalms of reorientation, but at no point in his analysis does he even mention that these psalms are part of a canonical collection.


244 John Webster, “Canon,” in Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible: 97–100, 99.
Canonical reading is not a precise methodology, but a “theological decision” about the appropriate boundaries for interpretation, in particular the final form of the text and its arrangement and ordering.\textsuperscript{245} The final form is considered not simply because it is the most recent level of tradition, or, as some critics have complained, because it is viewed as morally superior, but rather because it is “the aggregation of the entire history of the text’s development” that bears “the fullest witness to all that God has said and handed on within the community of faith.”\textsuperscript{246}

It is therefore unhelpful to think of “canon criticism” as a historical-critical method analogous to form or source criticism. This view has sometimes led to it being deployed as a supplemental interpretive step after each other method has been investigated,\textsuperscript{247} rather than allowing it to reframe the questions asked of the text from the outset. A canonical approach can take into account the results of source criticism, but builds upon them to enquire into the effect of the historical-theological portrayal in the final form of the text.\textsuperscript{248} This approach acknowledges and advocates for the theological view that the divine voice speaks through Scripture rather than through the historical events Scripture portrays.

A canonical approach could be employed for historical ends, asking historical questions about what has been discovered in light of the text’s final presentation. This is largely what has been done in applications of canonical approaches to the Psalter, which have focused on the reconstruction of redactional processes behind the final form of the text.\textsuperscript{249} An alternative, perhaps more generative, area of study, is to employ a canonical approach for theological ends, considering the theological implications of the final form.

\textsuperscript{245} Christopher Seitz, “Canonical Approach,” in Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible: 100–102, 101.
\textsuperscript{246} Ibid., 102.
\textsuperscript{247} For example, by Hossfeld and Zenger in their discussion of individual psalms throughout their commentary.
\textsuperscript{248} Seitz, The Character of Christian Scripture, 31–32.
\textsuperscript{249} Most obviously by Wilson, The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter.
of the text. Childs commends the canonical approach as a “fruitful avenue” for exploring the biblical text’s theological dimensions and freeing it for a “more powerful theological role within the life of the Christian church.” This is the approach advocated by Seitz and adopted in this thesis, applied in particular to the author’s own community of faith (see section 4.3.4 below).

2.3.2 Brevard Childs: An introduction to the canonical approach

The idea of a “canonical approach” is predominantly associated with one name: Brevard Childs (1923–2007). The term “canonical criticism” is first used by James Sanders and Childs’ early work in the area investigates similar questions. Childs becomes unhappy with that term and quickly discards it in favour of “canonical approach,” implying an exploration of the nature of the text rather than a new historical-critical method. Childs and Sanders differ in a number of areas, most particularly in their stance toward historical-critical methods and the relationship of their canonical proposals to them. In contrast to Sanders, who seeks to add a new discipline to the broader historical-critical field, Childs asserts a post-critical approach, seeking a genuinely new theological reading of the Scriptures.

Childs grew up in southern United States Presbyterian churches, served in the military during WWII, and studied at Princeton and the University of Basel. Although he uses modern historical critical methods in his work, he also critiques them. His 1970 work, Biblical Theology in Crisis, is an epitaph for the biblical theology movement of

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the 1960s, in which he experiments with a “new biblical theology” and suggests the New Testament use of the Old Testament as a possible point of departure. He therefore speaks of “canon” as the context that informs the reading of Scripture. In a 1972 journal article, he employs this method to consider the theological and hermeneutical implications of the canonical shaping of the Pentateuch. His 1974 commentary on Exodus applies his ideas more fully: after considering each unit of the text in terms of traditional historical-critical methods, he then looks at its “final form” and “canonical shape.” His 1977 article revives discussion of the “rule of faith” as the church’s summary of the gospel, arguing that the canonical context presupposes this idea.

Childs applies his approach to the entire Bible in two impressive introductions. He considers the canonical shape of each book and the theological implications of this shaping. He also clearly rejects Sanders’ understanding of “canonical criticism,” which he sees as trying to find evidence of a consistent canonical hermeneutic within the tradition history of Scripture itself, whereas his own approach focuses on the interpretation of the canon as we have it. In response to critics who envisage his approach as asserting moral authority on the part of the biblical redactors, Childs notes that it is not the redactional process itself that is normative for the community of faith, but the Scripture that reflects that process. In contrast to many historical-critical

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260 Childs, Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture, 57.
261 Ibid., 429.
methods, the materials for theological reflection are not the events or experiences behind the text, but the text itself.262

Childs continues to refine and develop his approach in later works. He demonstrates an ability to develop in his thinking and to change his mind over time as he interacts with both his critics and his advocates. For example, he explicitly rejects as inadequate his earlier proposal of starting from the New Testament’s use of the Old Testament.263 His approach has been criticised as too traditional to have relevance, particularly due to his failure to interact with emerging postmodern theological perspectives,264 but it is perhaps better to see him – like other theological interpreters of Scripture – as practicing a postcritical or “second naiveté” exegesis.

Childs speaks of “canonical intentionality” as a specific kind of human authorial intention.265 Barr criticises this as a “mystic phrase,” with Childs making a category mistake by attributing intention to the canon itself.266 The term serves for Childs, however, as a means of identifying those texts that are authoritative for the community of faith and is thus a theological confession about their function.267 The formation of the canon is more than simply a literary move; rather, the final form has theological intentionality.268 Similarly, the term “final form,” which is commonly used in descriptions of Childs’ approach, appears to have sometimes been misunderstood as focusing on a literary phenomenon. Childs instead focuses on canon as a theological

262 Childs, Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context, 6.
263 Brevard S. Childs, Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection of the Christian Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 76. Another example is his early use of the idea of “midrash” and his later rejection of this approach as inappropriate for Christian exegesis.
264 See Daniel R. Driver, Brevard Childs, Biblical Theologian: For the Church’s One Bible (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 10; Mark G. Brett, Biblical Criticism in Crisis? The Impact of the Canonical Approach on Old Testament Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 10, who seeks to correct Childs by placing the canonical approach “within a pluralist understanding of contemporary biblical studies.”
265 See MacDonald, 88.
phenomenon, constituting the community of faith’s witness to the one God. Rowe describes Childs’ work, in particular his *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, as a “hermeneutical outworking of a Trinitarian doctrine of God.” Childs explains the theological significance of his approach in this way:

> The reason for insisting on the final form of Scripture lies in the peculiar relationship between text and the people of God that is constitutive of the canon. The shape of the biblical text reflects a history of encounter between God and Israel. Canon serves to describe this peculiar relationship and to define the scope of this history by establishing a beginning and end to the process. The significance of the final form of the biblical text is that it alone bears witness to the full history of revelation.

### 2.3.3 Christopher Seitz: A theological-canonical approach

A number of scholars have continued to develop and apply canonical approaches, including Rolf Rendtorff, John Sailhamer, Charles Scalise, and Kevin Vanhoozer. Although there are “strong family resemblances” between their perspectives, the differing emphases are such that they cannot be considered to represent a single definable method. Christopher Seitz seeks to review reactions and criticisms to the canonical approach, to provide a fresh assessment of its strengths and weaknesses.

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270 Ibid., 169.
271 Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 75–76.
272 See, for example, Rolf Rendtorff, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1999).
276 Thiselton, 4.
possibilities, and to locate the canonical approach within the broader movement of the theological interpretation of Scripture.\textsuperscript{277} Seitz’s approach is adopted in this thesis.

Seitz (1954–), a student of Childs, is an Episcopal priest and an Old Testament professor. His earlier writings largely focus on the prophetic literature,\textsuperscript{278} however he has also written on both theological interpretation\textsuperscript{279} and the canonical approach\textsuperscript{280} and is widely viewed as a leading voice in the development of Childs’ project.\textsuperscript{281}

Seitz prefers the term “canonical approach” to “canon criticism,” affirming that it is a mistake to think of Childs’ proposal as a method that can be placed alongside form or redaction criticism, thereby reducing it to a supplemental move or final way to consider exegetical results. He submits that the key features of Childs’ approach are already present in \textit{Biblical Theology in Crisis}, naming them as a critiqued and recalibrated use of the historical-critical method, a unique handling of the final form of the text, “passing yet pregnant” observations on the status of the original language text traditions, a sensitivity to the premodern history of interpretation, and a biblical-theological handling of the two Testaments.\textsuperscript{282} Seitz notes that one difficulty in the scholarship has been how the approach is tied specifically to Childs himself and therefore both criticism and defence of it can and has become personalised.\textsuperscript{283}

Responding to criticisms of canonical approaches, Seitz submits that it is not about valuing later editing over earlier writing, or valuing some kind of “institutionalizing” process over against a more “inspirational” impulse of original

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\textsuperscript{278} Christopher R. Seitz, \textit{Isaiah 1–39} (Interpretation; Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1993); Seitz, \textit{Prophecy and Hermeneutics}.
\textsuperscript{280} Seitz, \textit{The Character of Christian Scripture}.
\textsuperscript{281} See, for example, Fowl, \textit{Theological Interpretation of Scripture}, 83; Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard Patterson, \textit{Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology} (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 157.
\textsuperscript{283} Seitz, \textit{The Character of Christian Scripture}, 32–33.
\end{flushleft}
authors. These are value judgments that might in fact not be true as later editors can actually highlight earlier levels of tradition. Moreover, such criticisms are sometimes based on a romanticised theory of the redactional process. A canonical approach is not about imputing moral authority to the final editors of the text but about accounting for the structure and presentation of the text as we have it. He does not deny the cruciality of the historical dimension or ignore aspects of the text that can only be explained by reference to sources and authors, but “judges the task far from complete when attention to these features fails to ask what effect has been achieved by bringing them together in one historical-theological portrayal in the final form of the text.”

As an approach that takes the theological unity and narrative shape of Scripture seriously and focuses on the final form and canonical location of biblical texts, a canonical perspective is particularly “hospitable” to theological readings of Scripture, hence the appropriateness of combining them in this thesis. The canonical process involved more than the mere collecting of texts, but included selecting, commenting (often with intertextual echoes), and ordering. This process and the resultant canonical tapestry stitched with deliberate textual threads hold theological significance in themselves. Thus for Seitz, a canonical approach serves theological interpretation, rather than being an end goal in itself.

For Seitz, a canonical approach has two key theological tenets. First, the Old Testament is Scripture in and of itself and thus provides its own distinctive theological contribution. Secondly, the final form and shaping of the Old Testament canon has a theological character and purpose.

284 Ibid., 52–53. Regarding the editors, he remarks that their “very nonappearance, moreover, is testimony to the degree to which they have sought to let the past have its own say.”
285 See ibid., 80–81.
286 Ibid. 32.
2.3.3.1 The distinctive theological contribution of the Old Testament

Seitz’s *The Character of Christian Scripture* was prompted by what he perceives as a danger posed by the recent focus in New Testament scholarship on the use of the Old Testament in the New: that the Old Testament is then viewed primarily through this lens. He is apprehensive lest the Old Testament be reduced to functioning merely as a piece of reception history for the New Testament. Instead, he builds a persuasive case for the theological role of the Old Testament on its own terms. He demonstrates that there is a place for distinctively Christian theological reflection on the Old Testament itself, not just as history-as-religion, but also as a “major doctrinal source for Christian reflection on God.”289 The Old Testament retains its “unto itself” or *Vetus Testamentum per se* theological voice as a witness to the Triune God.290 As he observes of the Psalms, “The psalms are Christian Scripture, and the use of them in the New Testament is but one incidental by-product of that larger theological fact.”291 Interpretation of the Old Testament should therefore be done according to its “canonical form and character,” which might not necessarily line up with its use in the New Testament because the Old Testament’s witness is far more “theologically ambitious” than that.292

A canonical-critical stance, as outlined by Seitz, takes seriously the intentionality of the final form of the text and is not preoccupied with historical reference at the expense of theological significance. Although different sources might in fact lie behind the text we have, the act of bringing together and shaping those sources into the final form is itself a theological contribution appropriate for consideration.293

289 Ibid., 90.
290 Ibid., 21.
291 Ibid., 149.
293 Seitz, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics*, 116. However, Seitz’s focus on affirming the Christian theological use of the Old Testament perhaps causes him to minimise its Jewish origins and continued usage. The work undertaken in this thesis is also undertaken in a distinctly Christian context, considering the effect of these texts on communities of faith located within the Protestant Christian tradition, while acknowledging that these texts have a history and continued use within other communities of faith that must be respected and learned from.
This approach seems particularly apt for psalms, which have been deliberately de-contextualised to be made available to the future community for its ongoing endeavour of constructive theological worldmaking.

The primary emphasis in this thesis is therefore what Seitz calls “the constructive theological contribution of the biblical texts themselves.” The canonical form of the Psalms both preserves these ancient songs and assumes that they will continue to “speak meaningfully across the ages,” allowing them to be used by later communities in their own situations to express praise, lament, and trust, among other dimensions of corporate worship. A canonical approach insists that the character of the canon is such that it seeks to speak to hearers wherever they stand in history, what Childs calls its “witness.” Thus for the Pilgrim Psalter, we can ask what effect its canonical presentation is intended to have on the community who participates in its enactment.

2.3.3.2 The theological purpose of the Old Testament's canonical shaping

A canonical-theological approach examines the text on the terms of its own biblical presentation. Seitz concludes that both the order and arrangement of material can be significant indicators for a canonical approach. He is careful to point out that this does not mean a “valorizing” of one particular version of the Masoretic Text, nor a “reifying” of an idealised Septuagint, and so does not necessarily consider the broad order of books as of crucial significance. With respect to the Book of the Twelve, Seitz identifies the content of its superscriptions, in particular the lack of consistent

295 Seitz, Prophecy and Hermeneutics, 150, using this description for the canonical form of the Minor Prophets.
297 Ibid., 71.
298 Ibid., 88.
299 “A canon that ends with Chronicles does not sound some sort of clear and distinctive notes over against one that ends with Malachi.” Ibid., 71–72.
temporal marking, as belonging to its canonical form and therefore having a logic that must be respected and interpreted.  

Seitz does not specifically mention the psalm titles, but any similar canonical reading of the Psalter must take these superscriptions seriously. Whether or not these superscriptions provide actual historical information about authorship or use of the psalms, they give a glimpse into the way these psalms were interpreted by those who placed them in their canonical setting and they continue to function as a lens through which later readers interpret these psalms. Thus they can be understood as having both a hermeneutical and a theological purpose. This idea is included in Zenger’s four principles of canonical exegesis of the Psalms. As well as paying attention to the connections between neighbouring psalms, psalms within an redactional unit, and the psalms within the Psalter as a whole – all of which have commonly been done by those who follow Wilson’s approach to the redaction of the Psalter – he adds a fourth principle of canonical exegesis of the Psalms: viewing the superscriptions as a “Deutehorizont.”

The superscriptions of the Pilgrim Psalter, in this case their consistency and hermeneutical framing, belong to their canonical form and the logic and the effect they have on the way the text is interpreted must be accounted for. The superscription is the collection’s most immediately obvious shared feature. Previous scholarship has tended to debate the translation and meaning of this title and to consider how it provides clues to the historical setting of these psalms, their gathering and editing as a collection, and their intended use. Accepting the broad consensus that the

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300 Seitz, Prophecy and Hermeneutics, 119.
301 See Gordon Wenham, “Towards a Canonical Reading of the Psalms,” in Canon and Biblical Interpretation: 333–351, 341. It is worth noting that the tradition of not including Psalm superscriptions as part of the verse numbering in English translations is not shared by Jewish/Hebrew translations, perhaps suggesting the latter have taken them more seriously.
title relates to pilgrimage, as well as noting the inherently performative nature of “songs,” this thesis focuses on the way the title provides a canonical framework for the collection, considering it as a reading strategy and performative frame that shapes their theological interpretation. It can be debated whether each individual psalm in the collection was originally composed for pilgrimage usage, but the canonical placement of each one within the collection with the superscription must have theological significance for how they are interpreted as Scripture. Thus the idea of pilgrimage functions as a hermeneutical lens through which they are heard, read, understood, enacted, and experienced. In order to incorporate these two last ways of engaging with the text, I now turn to the area of critical study that informs the use of performance as a method of research in this thesis.

2.4 Biblical performance criticism

2.4.1 Introduction

The Psalms have been widely studied as poetry, yet this is not the only way to think about their form and doing so can be a restrictive perspective. The category of poetry can cause readers to focus primarily on aesthetic value, rather than other features or purposes. Certainly the Psalms are poetic, as many contemporary songs are poetic, but an appreciation of their poetry is not their primary intent. They are inherently performative; preserved so they can be enacted by future communities of faith. Their use is deeply connected to liturgy and ritual. Psalms are not intended to be merely read, recited, or sung; they are to be performed, or perhaps better, enacted. They are to be embodied. Those who participate in their use then have their understanding of the world in which they live reframed or reshaped, even if this might be subconscious. In this way they are worldmaking.
Mowinckel and Gunkel, among others, recognise the oral origins of the Psalms but origins are only half the story. Orality also shapes the way they are later written and their ongoing usage by the community. Hossfeld and Zenger often refer to the “dramaturgy” of particular psalms, that is, the ways in which they have been composed for performance. A number of biblical scholars have recently begun to consider the possibilities offered for interpretation by performance criticism, which views texts as scripts and seeks to reorient the methods used to study a text in light of its oral dimensions. Surprisingly, there has been little application of performance criticism to the study of the Psalms, which at face value seem to be more inherently performative than many other parts of Scripture and which were intentionally collected for re-use and re-performance by future communities of faith.

The word “performance” has a wide range of meanings and usages. It can be used to describe the act of presenting a form of entertainment, the process of carrying out a task, and even the capacity of a vehicle or product. In performance studies it refers particularly to an act done consciously for others and more populist negative connotations of drawing attention to the self should not be assumed; its technical usage is to point to a reality beyond the self. A further limitation to the word performance is the danger that it implies a sharp disjuncture between the performer and the audience, whereas the biblical psalms are to be enacted not just for but by the community, making

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304 The Psalms in particular appear to have been intended for sung performance. Benjamin J. Segal, A New Psalm: The Psalms as Literature (Jerusalem: Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies, 2013); and David C. Mitchell, The Songs of Ascents: Psalms 120 to 134 in the Worship of Jerusalem’s Temples (San Bernardino: CreateSpace, 2015), among others, have sought to rediscover clues within the Psalter to their musical performance and their work might have further potential for performative perspectives. Given the speculative nature of much of this work, however, in this early stage of applying biblical performance criticism to the Psalms the scope of this study is limited to the interpretive insights that can be gained from spoken performance.
the word “enactment” perhaps more appropriate. Though the word “performance” is not perfect and some have suggested that alternatives might be less troublesome, it is generally accepted. Its usage in this thesis is intended to focus on insights from performance modes of thinking that can reshape the way biblical texts are interpreted and understood. The ultimate goal of such performance is audience or community transformation, a goal that corresponds with the ultimate goal of theological interpretation of Scripture. It seeks to accomplish this by rediscovering the power of the orality of biblical texts and using this in contemporary settings.

2.4.2 Orality studies

Performance criticism finds one of its antecedents in the recognition that biblical texts were composed to be spoken and heard. Orality studies pays attention to the sounds of texts including features such as wordplay and soundplay, which are difficult to hear in silent reading and are often sacrificed for clarity of meaning in translation. Despite the passing acknowledgement often given to the oral culture of ancient Israel, study of the Hebrew Bible – like most academic disciplines – has remained deeply embedded in the assumptions of print culture.

2.4.2.1 Print culture assumptions

Print was the medium in which biblical scholarship developed its practices, methodologies, and theories and is the almost exclusive focus of its hermeneutics.

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Biblical studies has generated what Ong calls “doubtlessly the most massive body of textual commentary in the world.” It has therefore been easy to project assumptions about books, authors, and editors back onto the Hebrew Bible without recognising the myriad ways in which holding a printed Bible in the hands can influence assumptions about Scripture.

Although interest in the “oral” has been strongly represented in biblical scholarship, it has tended to be on the basis that this is an oral “pre-history” that lies far behind the texts rather than informs their very core and being. Even when orality is recognised, print culture assumptions can drive scholars to prioritise the question of how oral traditions developed into written texts over how they were used, viewing oral tradition as “a kind of text that is only waiting to be set down in writing.” Further, assumptions are at times built on the presumption of a sharp disjunction between orality and literacy, whereas recent studies have shown that orality and literacy more often coexist and overlap. As Carr notes, “Scholars of antiquity are just at the beginning of exploring the interface between writing, performance, memorization, and the aural dimension of literary texts.”

311 See Ong, 20–30; John Miles Foley, “Plenitude and Diversity: Interactions between Orality and Writing,” in Weissenrieder and Coote, *The Interface of Orality and Writing*: 103–118, 103–6, on the work of Milman Parry and the development of the Oral-Formulaic Theory which effectively treated oral tradition as “un-literature.”
312 Ong, 174.
Scholarship can also tend to be guilty of a “chronological snobbery” that equates literacy with knowledge or intelligence. Those who are not literate can be assumed unthinkingly to be naïve, less knowledgeable, even less civilised. Perhaps we forget that oral traditions are vastly more pervasive and diverse than literature and that for the majority of its existence the Bible has been present in the life of the community of faith as an internalised, oral authority. Moreover, even though we live in a print culture, writing has never replaced speaking and we continue to enjoy and appreciate spoken performances.

Once the possibility that legitimate interpretation can involve more than words is seriously entertained, we realise that a hermeneutic that only works for written texts is incomplete. Adam uses the analogy of the incarnation: the word became flesh, not merely inscription. Printed words are external and unresponsive, so that texts can be viewed as documents that exist primarily to store information. Writings can also be treated as fragmented sections, losing the progressive rhetorical impact of experiencing a composition from beginning to end. For a literate person, writing can lock words into an inscribed space, making it difficult to recover a full sense of what speech is to those who are solely or predominantly oral. Significantly, print encourages a sense of finality, of a text that is closed and definitive, and has therefore generated an assumption that the aim is to discover one single best option for meaning in any given

315 The phrase is borrowed from C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1956), 166. See Dennis Dewey, “Performing the Living Word: Learnings from a Storytelling Vocation,” in Heiron and Ruge-Jones, *The Bible and Ancient and Modern Media*: 142–155, 143; Niditch, *Oral World*, 2, where she refers to Gunkel’s commentary on Genesis; Fowler, 7–8, who notes how uncomfortable many people today feel when it is suggested that Jesus might have been illiterate.
316 Foley, 107; Kelber, 87. See also Ong, 7–8, who asserts that of the thousands of languages in human history, only 106 have produced literature.
317 Adam, “Interpreting the Bible,” 164.
318 See Ong, 79, who notes that in the *Phaedrus*, Plato has Socrates objecting to writing on the basis that it destroys the memory.
320 Ong, 12.
biblical passage, an assumption challenged by oral culture and also— not without irony— digital culture, inscribed though it largely is.

A further limitation to a hermeneutic based on the printed word can be its tendency toward individualism. Print creates a sense of private ownership of words, leading to a cultural experience of biblical engagement that often favours individual, silent reading. Ong notes that manuscripts— with their glosses and marginal comments— remain closer to the give and take of oral expression. The Ketziv/Qere notes in the Masoretic Text— noting where oral pronunciation differs from what the written text suggests— attests to the prominence of orality and a living sense of the text that continued well into the Common Era. Although much biblical interpretation has largely operated out of an individualistic orientation, the texts of the Hebrew Bible are products of a collective or community orientation. It is important to understand the mode of thought operative in that community and how it differs from print culture assumptions.

2.4.2.2 Literacy and orality in ancient Israel

It is clear that literacy was extremely limited in the ancient world, with estimates ranging from 2–10% of society. Scholars including Niditch and Miller persuasively demonstrate that the evidences for writing we do have— ostraca, seals, and inscriptions

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321 Adam, “Interpreting the Bible,” 161.
323 Ong, 132.
– do not themselves indicate a widespread literate culture. They are, rather, the kind of writing that demonstrates how few people wrote, with writing serving a largely symbolic or iconic role. Carr suggests that literacy in late pre-exilic Judah would have been limited to a handful of administrative professionals along with lower-level regional functionaries. Communication between most people was therefore largely, if not entirely, oral.

The vast majority of the population of Israel would have had no experience of written manuscripts. Even the small numbers of the elite who were literate continued to learn the texts they copied by oral recitation. Unlike books, scrolls were essentially useless for information retrieval or reference checking. They were extraordinarily expensive to procure, cumbersome to hold, and difficult to read. They were primarily useful to those who had already internalised the text and therefore knew what they were seeing. Both before and after the exile, the great majority of people engaged with the biblical text aurally.

Niditch notes that even the written form of the Hebrew Bible is quite “unlike a book.” It cannot be understood through the lens of modern literacy; its writings are more effectively grasped in the context of an oral mentality. The word אֲרֵג is used for “reading,” suggesting it refers to a process by which a text is verbalised for the benefit

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327 See Robert Miller, *Oral Tradition*, 47–49; Niditch, *Oral World*, 58–62, who suggests that inscriptions were not necessarily available to be seen and that the presence of seals indicates that documents were not intended to be regularly opened or consulted.
329 Rhoads, “Performance Criticism—Part 1,” 122; Horsley, 11; Carr, 6: “Few of the literate would have progressed to the point where they would have been able or motivated to use such texts to access traditions they did not already know.”
331 Kelber, 74.
of hearers. The written texts were not intended to be widely read, but rather largely served a monumental or symbolic purpose, attesting to the divine authority of their public oral performance. Unlike literate cultures, where learning is about mastery of information that can be read and so is kept externalised, the goal of performance in an oral culture was the internalisation of the text.

2.4.2.3 Features of oral cultures

Orality is not a style or genre, but a mode of thought through which a full range of compositions can be expressed. For our culture, if a word or idea is important it should be written down to be preserved. In an oral culture, it is plausible that some words were considered far too important to be frozen into the “stillness” of writing. Similarly, although we might intuitively consider written or printed documents to be more reliable than spoken words, those in oral cultures would think the opposite. A written text could be amended “out of earshot” of the community. Dewey surmises: “One can almost imagine a hypothetical parent of this transitional time exclaiming, ‘These kids and their books today! When I was a kid, you had to know something! What is the world coming to if you look everything up in a book!’”

Ong describes orally based thought as additive, aggregative, copious, empathetic, participatory, and situational. In an oral culture, knowledge must be formulaic, patterned, and mnemonic, otherwise it can only exist as passing thoughts. Spoken words are viewed as powerful and effective, able to create reality, seen, for example, in

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335 Horsley, 41–42.
336 Kelber, 73.
337 See Kelber, 80, who references a comment by Ong in response to a student’s question why Jesus did not write His words down.
338 Dewey, 152.
339 See Ong, 36–57.
the Hebrew Bible with words of blessing and cursing that are understood to actualise what they pronounce.\textsuperscript{341} In an oral culture, words are always personally embodied and connected to movement.\textsuperscript{342} Oral cultures are communal cultures in which the group identity is primary; as community members interact with one another, beliefs are shared and maintained. Knowledge and tradition are therefore empathic, communal experiences.\textsuperscript{343}

Words in oral traditions are internalised.\textsuperscript{344} Words held in the memory belong to the one who knows them, unlike words contained in historical records, which are externalised. Modern scholars embedded in print-cultural assumptions have long pondered the way the Hebrew Bible is “quoted” in the New Testament. An oral-culture perspective would suggest it more likely that scribes were so imbued with the language of the Scriptures that they thought and composed in similar language without any necessary reference to specific parts of the text itself.\textsuperscript{345} Moreover, memory is communal. The receivers of oral tradition understand themselves not as isolated individuals but as part of a lineage. In fact, the past “is never ‘past’ in the way we might conceive it but stands in the ancient world as a potentially realizable ‘present’ to which each generation seeks to return.”\textsuperscript{346}

Although biblical studies rooted in print culture assumptions often seeks primarily to discern the meaning of a text, an oral-performative perspective looks also to the effect of the text performed in community. Texts are not treated as artefacts from which history might possibly be reconstructed, but as generative communications that


\textsuperscript{342} See Ong, 67–68, who observes that even motionlessness during speech is itself a powerful gesture.

\textsuperscript{343} Rhoads, “Performance Criticism—Part 1,” 121; Ong, 45.


\textsuperscript{345} Horsley, 121.

\textsuperscript{346} Carr, 11.
invoke change in people’s lives. Within an oral mode of thought, texts are not necessarily seen as fixed. A pervasive print culture assumption is the necessity of reproduction with exactitude and precision.  

It is far more likely people in an oral culture expected texts and performances to vary slightly each time they were represented. Study of the Hebrew Bible manuscripts discovered at Qumran suggest that the books were multiform, rather than consisting of one single early text. The assumption that the Bible is static and unchanging might prove to be a modernist chimera arising from the fixity of printed individual copies, increasingly usurped by the experience of digital natives who expect to have access to multiple translations, both ancient and modern, to compare online.

Texts in oral cultures exist to be performed. The text functions as a starting point, a type of script, for oral performance, although there can be expected to be a shift away from improvisation toward memorisation. Oral performances can serve the purposes of entertainment, education, and formation. Performance by definition involves more than simply a voice. In a performance, “a text is incarnated in the midst of a gathered community.” Moreover, the encounter between performance and audience adds a generative dialogicity to language that is distinctive to this mode of presentation.

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347 Fowler, 7.
348 It should not be wrongly assumed that oral memory is inherently accurate. See Dale C. Allison Jr., *Reconstructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 2, who notes that memory is “reconstructive as well as reproductive.”
349 Horsley, 32–33. See also Ian Young, “The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Bible: The View from Qumran Samuel,” *ABR* 62 (2014): 14–30, 30, who concludes, “Each manuscript of a biblical book is one telling (or ‘performance’) of a community tradition where the exact wording is not as important as the effective conveying of what was understood to be the meaning of the tradition.”
352 Ruge-Jones, 102.
2.4.3 Performance studies

Alongside its attempt to take orality seriously, biblical performance criticism finds another antecedent in the established discipline of performance studies, an intricate web of disciplinary and interpretive approaches that study texts through performance. Definitions of performance are not settled; nor is there a single theory on what performance does or how it does it.\(^{354}\) Turner speaks of the performance arts as one of the progeny of ritual,\(^ {355}\) noting that both ritual and performance involve liminal events and processes.\(^ {356}\) Giles and Doan’s broad delineations of different terms are useful. They define theatre as human beings “presenting” themselves to others, drama as presentation in imagined acts, dramaturgy as the art of dramatic composition and enactment, and performance studies as the field of study that critically analyses performance and performativity.\(^ {357}\) Performance criticism examines the way performances express social values and performance mode of thought is a way of thinking, the “shared imaginative space” where performers and audiences meet.\(^ {358}\)

Key elements of performance include communication that is “more-than-textual,” that is, with features including intonation, gesture, pause, and interaction determinative of meaning, the physical and spatial embodied presence of the one performing, and an audience or community to whom the performance is presented.\(^ {359}\) These resonate with theological concepts including incarnation, presence, and community. Performance

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\(^{354}\) See Carlson, 5; Doan and Giles, *Prophets, Performance and Power*, 16.


\(^{356}\) *Ibid.*, 8. Liminality refers to being held in a place of transition, on the threshold between old and new.


\(^{359}\) See Foley, 116; Todd E. Johnson and Dale Savidge, *Performing the Sacred: Theology and Theatre in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 16.
studies have also recognised that performance has the power to produce social change\footnote{Linda M. Park-Fuller, “Audiencing the Audience: Playback Theatre, Performative Writing, and Social Activism,” \textit{Text and Performance Quarterly} 23 (2003): 288–310, 288; Turner, 17–18.} and can therefore be worldmaking.

Within performance studies there are theorists who study performance purely as critics or “outsiders” as well as those who practice performance themselves and are therefore “insiders.”\footnote{Doan and Giles, \textit{Prophets, Performance and Power}, 11.} The breadth of “voices, themes, opinions, methods, and subjects” relating to performance studies means that no single methodology can be simplistically appropriated and applied to new situations.\footnote{Jeanette Mathews, “Translating Habakkuk as a Performance,” in Maxey and Wendland, \textit{Translating Scripture for Sound and Performance}: 119–138, 120.} In the same way that a concern with performance has reshaped the fields of anthropology and ethnography,\footnote{See Carlson, 11–30.} however, performance can help reframe how we think about biblical studies as a whole. At the same time, a canonical-theological approach to the texts of Scripture differs from the way scripts for performance are normally approached, necessitating a distinctive biblical methodology within performance criticism.

\subsection*{2.4.4 The emergence of biblical performance criticism}

Discussions around orality and performative features have been taking place in biblical studies for around thirty years.\footnote{See Maxey, 2.} The language of performance has also been used as a metaphor for the message and impact of Scripture.\footnote{For example, Hans Urs von Balthasar, \textit{Theodrama: Theological Dramatic Theory} (5 volumes; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988–1998); Vanhoozer, \textit{The Drama of Doctrine}.} The naming of “biblical performance criticism” as a distinct methodology, however, can be dated to Doan and Giles’ 2005 book and David Rhoads’ 2006 publication in \textit{Biblical Theology Bulletin}.\footnote{Doan and Giles, \textit{Prophets, Performance and Power}; Rhoads, “Performance Criticism—Part 1;” Rhoads, “Performance Criticism—Part 2.”} Since then, the Society of Biblical Literature annual meetings have held sessions...
focusing on biblical performance criticism as an emerging discipline. Maxey observes that biblical scholars in orality studies are primarily concerned with an academic approach to the texts, whereas performance criticism seeks to be also a practice-based discipline engaged in the application of its methods to both translation and performance. 367

The word “performance” is therefore used as “an impetus to dissolve traditional disciplinary and methodological boundaries in order to explore more general concerns.” 368 Biblical performance criticism is an eclectic discipline, drawing on the contributions of a variety of other methods. Rhoads considers the contributions of historical, form, genre, narrative, reader-response, rhetorical, textual, orality, social-science, linguistic, and ideological criticisms, as well as speech-act theory, translation, theatre studies, and oral interpretation studies. 369 Performance criticism involves shifts in thinking from written to oral, from private to public, from silence to hearing, and from individuals to communities. 370 Its proponents conclude that by studying biblical texts in an exclusively written medium we have not fully understood them and have conceivably misunderstood them at times. Rhoads frames the key question for performance criticism this way: “How can we find rigorous ways to analyse all these elements of the performance event together so as to transform the ways we interpret the written texts we have before us?” 371

Biblical performance criticism has predominantly been applied to New Testament texts. Performance criticism of the Hebrew Bible remains in its early and formative stages. The prophets have attracted the greatest amount of attention in the

367 Maxey, 5–6.
368 Carlson, 74.
371 Ibid., 131.
area, leaving much of the Hebrew Bible yet to be encountered in this way, despite it being in accord with its fundamental character as an oral document. Faro suggests that in an analogous way to vowels being provided for a Hebrew manuscript, performance provides dimensions that are suggested by but absent from the written text. Giles and Doan propose that both the way of thinking and the manner of communicating common in performance are prevalent “just beneath the surface” of the Hebrew Bible. They have explored the application of biblical performance criticism to what they call “twice-used” songs – those embedded within prose narratives – but propose that performance criticism can find application throughout the entire Hebrew Bible, specifically noting its appropriateness for the Psalms, which by their canonical presentation are clearly intended to be re-performed by later communities of faith. As Brueggemann notes, “the Psalms do not readily lend themselves to ‘being a text.’ Perhaps the Psalms were never intended in such a way. One can judge at the outset that because they are poetry often joined with music, performance in ways other than proclamation may be preferable.”

Biblical performance scholars work in at least three areas: imagining the original performance events of biblical texts within their oral cultures, using performance analysis to reorient traditional methods of studying biblical texts, and using contemporary performance to re-imagine the meaning and impact of biblical texts.

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373 In a conversation with Rhoads, cited in “Performance as Research,” 179. See also Ong, 90.


376 Of course, the Psalms have been performed by many different communities of faith throughout history, both sung and spoken. The approach taken within this thesis seeks to apply the emerging discipline of biblical performance criticism to the Psalms as an additional and alternative approach, recognising that there might be commonalities as well as distinctives that emerge in so doing.


378 See Rhoads, “Performance as Research,” 164.
The first is a historical study: investigating art and literature for depictions and descriptions of ancient performances, as well as looking for clues in the writings themselves. The second uses performance as a means by which other methodologies are re-conceptualised. The third allows the translation, memorisation, and performance of Scripture to act as a research method in and of itself. With the ultimate goal of a theological interpretation of the Psalms of Ascents, this thesis works within this last area, exploring how performance can assist in understanding what these texts do, that is, how they impact those who participate in their enactment.

Studying the biblical texts as performances can bring new life to interpretation. Rhoads likens biblical critics who interpret these writings without giving attention to the nature of their performance to musicologists who study the score of a composition without ever hearing it performed. Performance criticism looks at the event of performing a text – including sound, location, and audience response – and asks how these factors suggest potential meaning and impact. Performing biblical texts allows the interpreter to encounter them from a new perspective, stepping “inside” the world of the text. Dewey draws an important distinction between the analogies of theatre and storytelling. The former is indirect and requires the audience to suspend disbelief, whereas the latter involves direct interaction between performer and audience. When it comes to the biblical text, the aim is not to maintain distance, but rather to draw the audience in so as to become future participants in the performance themselves. Performance of ancient texts allows for the recall of the past as a “realizable ‘present.’”

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379 Rhoads, “Performance Criticism—Part 1,” 119. See also Carr, 4.
381 Dewey, 143–44.
382 Giles and Doan, Twice Used Songs, 6.
Biblical performance criticism not only acknowledges that all translation is interpretation, it celebrates this fact by inviting both performer and audience into a live interpretation event. Performing and hearing texts opens up new possibilities for identifying and understanding discourse features.\[383\] The act of translating for oral performance can lead the translator to notice aural and oral features of texts otherwise overlooked. Oral performance can also maintain features of a text that might be awkward when written, such as shifting tenses or persons and word order, bringing out possible emphases and tensions in the text.\[384\] Performance explicitly acknowledges that communication involves more than merely an exchange of ideas; it engages the imagination.\[385\] In performance, the text becomes living and active and it is hoped that people experience the transcendent, the sacred.

Biblical performance criticism is not without its challenges, including the elusive or fleeting nature of ancient performances, overcoming language and cultural barriers, developing criteria to create and evaluate performances, and critically assessing something that is inherently subjective and emotional.\[386\] Recovering ancient performances in particular is fraught with historical challenges\[387\] and is beyond the scope of this study. This thesis draws from one particular attempt to meet these challenges in relationship to the interpretation of the texts of the Psalms of Ascents by using performance as research (see section 2.4.6 below).

### 2.4.5 Key themes in biblical performance criticism

Four key themes emerge from this survey of biblical performance critical scholarship.

First, performances can countenance greater scope and flexibility for potential

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\[384\] Ibid., 171.
\[387\] See Hurtado.
interpretations of texts, while simultaneously testing those interpretations. Secondly, performances are inherently communal rather than individual, allowing performers and audiences to participate in the “event” of a text in the moment of performance, as well as participate in a sense of continuity with previous and future performances. Thirdly, in performances a text is embodied rather than merely read; time, space, setting, sound, and movement enliven and incarnate the words. Finally, performance has a distinct power to engage and transform those who participate in the enactment of texts, performers and audiences alike. Each of these themes is now considered in turn.

2.4.5.1 Translation and interpretation possibilities
A performance mode of thought will significantly influence both the translation and interpretation of biblical texts. A translation for performance is not faced with the same limitations as a translation for print. It does not need to “harmonize away” perceived inconsistencies but can in fact seek to observe and use any performative features that might be apparent in such seeming “ungrammaticalities.” Translation for performance considers not only what words mean, but how they sound, any connections between them implied by their aural features, what emotions and actions they evoke, and what worlds they create for a particular audience. Thus a performance translation stresses lexical consistency, the use and purposes of repetition, and the metonymic use of language, where words and ideas can evoke a wider and deeper range of connections than the immediate textual context might suggest. Mathews refers to these as “ready-mades”: a store of short commonplaces or clichés based on the assumption of shared

392 Niditch, Oral World, 11.
cultural knowledge and references between performer and audience that performers can use when improvising. Thus the performance translator seeks to pay particular attention to features including wordplay, assonance, and vivid imagery, reproducing their effects if at all possible in their own language. Nässelqvist notes that translation for performance must carefully understand how the text in its original language seeks to inform and influence and then find corresponding ways of achieving the same effects in the language of the audience. This includes acknowledgment that the pace and sound of words contribute to these effects. Furthermore, a performance translation can be responsive to each audience’s particularity, exegeting and addressing their unique context and characteristics, or explaining aspects of the text that might in that context be misunderstood or overlooked. A translation undertaken prior to performance is focused on the impact of the text on the audience. It seeks not only to capture the imagery that is in the text but also to replicate its capacity to “provoke vivid imagining” in an audience. Translation of the Psalms of Ascents in this thesis is undertaken with a view to all these aspects of performance.

As an art form, a performance explicitly presents one possible interpretation of a text; it does not claim to be the final interpretation or a rediscovery of the authorial intent. It openly acknowledges the possibilities of multiple interpretations and allows authority to reside not in one all-powerful interpreter, but in the community who receives the interpretation. Rhoads speaks of “meaning potential” rather than the single meaning of a text and emphasises the potential impacts on a gathered collective community over the intention of the author.

395 Lee, 308.
397 See Maxey, 11.

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In performance, an interpretation of the text is expressed but also tested. Performance of a text creates interpretive possibilities, but it also places limits on them. The performer can discover interpretations that might seem to “work” when reading the text but do not work in performance. Ruge-Jones notes how his students engaging in performance of biblical texts recognised that some of their presuppositions about the text were shaken. A performance is experienced as a whole and thus the text chosen for performance is also experienced as a whole: transitions or gaps that might be experienced as “jumpy” for readers can become coherent in a performance that handles them in an innovative or interesting way. Multiple performances of the Pilgrim Psalter provide a basis for refining both the translation and its interpretation in this thesis.

2.4.5.2 Communal interpretation

Unlike much reading, performance has an inherently social and relational nature. The presence of others means the audience responds as an ensemble or collective. Audience is a collective noun; to be an audience is to participate with others in the experience of a text. Seeing and hearing a performance can bind a community together. Ong notes how this experience of unity can be disrupted by the provision of a written handout, causing each reader to enter his or her own private world, with unity restored only when oral speech begins again.

Performances are events, with both the performer and the audience active participants, albeit not in the same way. Performances of theological texts are experiences located within the community of faith, dovetailing with the approach of

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399 Ruge-Jones, 106.
400 See ibid., 111.
402 See Ong, 74, who points out that there is no equivalent collective noun for readers – “readership” being a “far-gone abstraction.”
403 Ibid., 74.
theological interpretation (see section 2.2.4.1 above). Performance of a community’s traditions can allow that community to re-enact the past as a shared experience in the present. Those experiencing a performance of a text not only participate in its enactment together but can recognise their connection to a history of performances that come before and after.\textsuperscript{404} Giles and Doan observe how the manifestation of cultural memory allows a group in the present to define what they are or are not by reconstructing the past in such a way as to form a communal identity among the hearing community in which the values and perspectives of all are shared.\textsuperscript{405} Moreover, performance connects the memory of a text to space and this helps make the memory social or collective.\textsuperscript{406} Performance has a public dimension, which can function as a reminder that biblical interpretation should not take place behind closed doors, but instead needs to be engaged with the community of faith’s social and political context.\textsuperscript{407}

2.4.5.3 Embodiment

Reading a text situates the reader as an observer, looking outward at words. Hearing and seeing a text performed situates the hearer as a receiver, taking in words and body language. Reading is a predominantly mental process. Experiencing a text as a performance touches a wider array of subconscious processes in the audience, allowing us to be affected “where we live, not just the narrow place where we think.”\textsuperscript{408} Through a performance, audiences can experience how the text addresses not only their minds, but their bodies and spirits as well.\textsuperscript{409} Because performance communication necessarily takes place in the context of physical presence, it cannot be impersonal.

\textsuperscript{404} Langellier, 37; see also Giles and Doan, Twice Used Songs, 47.
\textsuperscript{405} Giles and Doan, Twice Used Songs, 22.
\textsuperscript{406} Maxey, 9.
\textsuperscript{409} Ruge-Jones, 112.
In the performance of biblical texts, the word becomes flesh: “the text becomes a living reality that can be seen, heard, and taken in by one’s whole being.” The performer takes on the text in an embodied way, living it out in their voice, expressions, and movement in real time and space. Bland and Fleer suggest that to engage the world the psalms imagine, we cannot start by explaining this world, we need to find a way to move into it. Performance can provide such a way. A performance must “take place”: it has to be experienced as a spatial reality. It is therefore understood to have effects on our worlds and lives, which also take up space. Swanson suggests that when an audience sees a text embodied in space, questions of emotion, motivation, and response arise such that the text has an ethical impact: “Once you take up space as an aid to interpretation, you cannot simply retreat to the static spiritual answers provided by dogmatic interpretation.”

2.4.5.4 Transformative power

A performer embodies the text, but it can also be said that the performance event allows the text to become embodied in the community. Reading Scripture as a performance “is a reminder that for faithful readers biblical books are scripts to be enacted and lived.” Those who have participated as audiences in performances of biblical texts speak of it as a shared experience that often feels as though they were hearing the text for the first time. As well as giving information about the text, performance invites the community into a transformational encounter with it. Again, this correlates with the

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410 West, “Performance Criticism of the Narratives,” 15.
411 Dave Bland and David Fleer, “Introduction: Performing the Psalms and the World Imagined in the Psalter,” in Fleer and Bland, Performing the Psalms: 1–6, 2.
413 Ibid., 140.
ultimate goal of theological interpretation, that is, community transformation (see section 2.2.4.3 above).

Like rituals, performances are both dynamic and transformative, that is, they change and they change things.416 Through a performance, both performer and audience are changed. Performance allows for an integrated experience of the text; there is no separation of form and function, or of meaning and impact. Meaning is found not in ideas alone but in relationship as the performer seeks to allow their interpretation of the text to transform the hearers.417 The transformation generated by performance is primarily communal rather than individual. The shared experience of being an audience provides solidarity and communal identity. The performance becomes part of social memory.418 The performance also has an impact both in the moment of its occurrence and in any ongoing changes in the community, whether attitudinal, relational, or behavioural.419

Performance can therefore be worldmaking, Brueggemann’s term for what the Psalms do, as they both witness and make available a “counter-world”420 (see section 2.2.5.4 above). He mentions performance as one way this function of the Psalms can be accomplished, but focuses predominantly on form criticism, leaving worldmaking as an idea requiring further elaboration.421 Performance offers a new paradigm to consider this idea. Brueggemann appeals to Ricoeur’s theory of language, that language has a

418 Rhoads, “Performance as Research,” 190.
421 Walter Brueggemann, personal correspondence, March 27, 2014. Brueggemann’s idea of the Psalms as worldmaking is perhaps limited by his tendency to focus this description on the psalms of orientation, which he considers “not the most interesting,” Brueggemann, From Whom No Secrets Are Hid, 155. In this, he might be heavily influenced by his context, in which he sees a settled church experience where hymns have represented control and ideology, which leads him at times to suggest that praise/orientation represents an old ideology that needs to be overcome, rather than the new world that we are invited to enter.
creative or evocative function: “It does not simply follow reality and reflect it, but it leads reality to become what it is not.”

In a similar way, Wright speaks of the Psalms as texts that help us not only to understand a different worldview but to inhabit it and Bland and Freer note that the Psalms seek to shape us by imagining a world and inviting us to enter it.

Rhoads speaks of performance similarly, as “an attempt to create a world.” Performance seeks to allow the community to think differently about its own world and to inspire or persuade the community to allow their world to be transformed. Spoken, performed words are powerful. Even in our print culture, we understand the power of words which once spoken cannot be taken back. The Hebrew Bible proclaims a world spoken into being by God’s words (Gen 1). Words can create and transform worlds. Performance of the words of Scripture has the power to be truly worldmaking.

2.4.6 Performance as research

Rhoads talks about entering the world of the text by performance, gaining an immediate experience of it, and imagining and hearing it rather than seeing it as words on a page. There is much to be gained, therefore, by the interpreter becoming a performer and allowing performance of the text to become an avenue of exegetical and theological research. Grimes speaks of ritualising as the act of “stepping in to be,” whereas researching is typically the act of “stepping back to know.” Using performance as research allows the interpreter to do both. A contemporary performance of a text is an embodied interpretation. The performer thus becomes a living medium, bearing the

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424 Bland and Fleer, 2.
426 Rhoads, “Performance Criticism—Part 1,” 120.
427 Grimes, 23.
meaning and impact of the text.\textsuperscript{428} The performer experiences the text in a unique way, even as the audience experiences it afresh. For this thesis, performance as research involves a number of steps: translating the text for performance; learning the translation “by heart”; choosing and preparing how to perform the text in terms of movement, gesture, use of space, tone, and pace; multiple performances; receiving and analysing audience feedback; and post-performance reflection. The performance is not an end in and of itself, rather, each step in the process is part of a method of exploring the text’s meaning and impact.

Rhoads advocates “performance as research” because it can help interpreters investigate the range of potential meanings, explore the potential rhetorical impacts, and recover oral and emotive dimensions of the text.\textsuperscript{429} Importantly, contemporary performers of biblical texts need to decide whether to perform in the original language or their own. Although hearing the original language can allow audiences to experience poetic dimensions of the text’s sound, it is unlikely that contemporary audiences are able to experience the text in a meaningful way other than in their own language. The interpreter must therefore translate for performance and in doing so carefully consider word choice, word order, sounds, pauses, pace, and many other aspects of how to communicate the text effectively.\textsuperscript{430} The performer must pay careful attention to who is speaking so that the changing directions of discourse – so common in the Psalter but easily overlooked or smoothed over in written translation – can be illuminated by gesture or movement.

Performing is not simply about memorisation but about knowing the text so as to convey its worldmaking potential compellingly. Many biblical performance scholars therefore distinguish memorisation or rote recitation from internalisation or “learning by


\textsuperscript{429} Rhoads, “Performance as Research,” 168–69.

\textsuperscript{430} See \textit{ibid.}, 172.
heart.”431 The act of learning a text by heart enables the interpreter to get “inside” the world of the text.432 The text is experienced as a whole, with each part interpreted in relation to each other part and the whole. The performer is also able to experience the unfolding of the text in time.433 Learning the biblical text for performance forces the interpreter to address the issue of subtext, which can be ignored in silent reading. Subtext is an integral part of verbal communication and can often determine meaning.434 The text is experienced not only by what is said, but also by how it is said. Performance seeks to recover a text’s emotive dimensions, which can again be obscured by the silent reading of written texts. The exegete-as-performer must think carefully about the emotions expressed and evoked by the text.435 If the performer is to embody the text, she must know it well enough that she can speak the words as if they are her own. Furthermore, once a text has been internalised, the interpreter is able to hold the entire text in her mind simultaneously and is therefore able to intuit whether a possible interpretation that might seem legitimate for one portion of the text would violate elements of other portions.436

Performing a text calls on the interpreter to draw on careful study of dimensions of the text that are not able to be replicated in print, adding gesture, pace, movement, proximity, and body language in ways that enhance and underline meaning. These stimulate for the audience an “imaginative seeing” of the text that is much more than silent reading or sound alone can evoke.437

431 See Ward and Trobisch, 70; Rhoads, “Performance Criticism—Part 1,” 125.
433 Ibid., 175.
The act of performing will itself help the interpreter discern possible meanings of the text. Embodying the text places the interpreter in a unique relationship with the text, allowing the performance to be both an interpretation and a test of possible interpretations. The regular practice and performance of tone, pace, and gesture in an attempt to engage the audience with the text brings depth to the interpreter’s understanding. Multiple performances of the same text provide opportunities to learn what works and what does not.

The performer needs to understand the culture, situation, and perspective of each audience to be able to address the performance of the text to their circumstances appropriately. Performing a text reinforces to the interpreter that the purposes of biblical texts are communication and transformation. The performer-exegete embodies that purpose as they seek to persuade the audience to receive and be impacted by the text and its way of seeing the world, which dovetails well with the goal of theological interpretation, to allow the community to be shaped and changed by the text. The performer seeks to engage the audience and draw them into the world of the text, allowing them to experience its effects. Ward and Trobisch note the importance of framing a performance, signalling to the audience when they are stepping into and out of the world of the text. The verbalising of the psalm superscriptions can have this function of framing performances of the collection.

Performance can be a substantial test of interpretation. The performer can identify possible interpretations that do not “work” in performance and, likewise, the audience is also able to demonstrate by their responses which interpretations might be challenging, controversial, or even unacceptable. The audience participates by their 

439 Rhoads, “Performance Criticism—Part 2,” 175.
440 Ward and Trobisch, 94.
441 Rhoads, “Performance as Research,” 191.
very presence, but also by their reactions during the performance and their reflections afterwards. Discussion with the audience can help the performer understand the impact of the text. Further reflection on the experience of performing draws together many different threads of understanding. The work underpinning this thesis, therefore, includes analysis of audience feedback on performances of the text (see section 4.4 below) as well as the performer’s own reflections.

2.4.7 Researching the audience

A performance does not happen without an audience. They are essential to the working out of the interpretation. Performance studies theorists assert that a performance is completed only when an audience experiences it. Theatre theorists have pointed out that an audience experiencing a performance is in a liminal space: they are therefore open to a new “world” and their own world can be transformed by this experience.

Being an audience is not a simple process. It begins in advance of the actual performance, as people gather knowledge and build expectations, and it continues after the performance event, as people reflect and converse about what the experience meant. Strictly speaking, the term audience designates not a group of listeners but the function of those who receive and respond to a performance.

Audiences are not passive vessels or inactive consumers of a performance. They construct meaning from their experiences and they do so communally as they interact with one another. The word “audience” denotes more than a gathering of individuals, it refers to a group that becomes a whole that is greater than the sum of its

445 See Langellier, 37.
446 Reason, 32.
Therefore, a central emerging concept in the field of contemporary audience research is that of the interpretive community. The dynamics of performance mean a collective identity can be formed as the audience responds to the experience of participating in a performance event together. For a performance of a biblical text, this dynamic can allow members of the community of faith to respond to and process a text communally, an experience that is largely unfamiliar to contemporary Bible readers but likely captures something of the dynamic the text’s original hearers experienced.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that audiences find experiencing performances of biblical texts more memorable, engaging, and affective than hearing them read. Rhoads notes the insights gained by attending to the responses of audiences and encourages the use of information gained in this way in interpretation. The audience is the least studied element in performance studies, likely due to the challenges in accessing audience members’ responses to a performance. Some work has been done in cognitive neuroscience exploring brain processes in audience members while they experience a performance. Such recording of audience responses during a performance tends to be distracting, however, and distances the individual from the experience of being in the audience. Qualitative audience research seeks to analyse descriptions of how audiences experience live performances by seeking their reflective responses after the performance event. This is typically done through group discussion or interviews. This is a different form of research, which accepts that performance is a communal experience and that therefore post-performance conversation and discussion are part of the experience of being an audience.

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447 Langellier, 35.
448 Martin Barker, “I Have Seen the Future,” 133.
449 See Dewey, 152–53.
450 Rhoads, “Performance Criticism—Part 1,” 121; personal correspondence with the author. To date, it appears no audience research of biblical performances has been published.
451 Park-Fuller, 307, who cites Langellier, 34.
452 Reason, 18.
453 See Park-Fuller, 290.
Post-performance discussion with the audience allows the opportunity to reflect on and reinforce the communal, emotive, and worldmaking dimensions of the text.\textsuperscript{454} People make sense of and invest meaning in an experience through conscious reflection. Therefore, it can be argued that the meaning of an experience is accessible only through engaging with a person’s retrospective consciousness of it. An audience’s self-reflection and memory after a performance is a central facet of the experience itself.\textsuperscript{455} Many people feel a need to share and communicate their experiences of a performance. Audience members who interact with one another explore their memories and negotiate their experiences and in so doing discover what it “meant” to them. As members of the audience share and remember together, they are not only making sense of their experience, but continuing to make the experience itself.\textsuperscript{456} In this study, therefore, audience members participated in small group discussion immediately following a performance to provide space for this part of experience (see Appendices 1 and 2b).

McConachie notes that many critics and historians of the theatre have described audience experience as a kind of “reading,” borrowing the assumptions of semiotics and thereby relegating performance to a one-way delivery of content.\textsuperscript{457} But the dynamics of being in an audience include cognitive processes within the individual as well as social and cultural engagement as a member of the collective.\textsuperscript{458} Much audience research has also been conducted for utilitarian purposes, seeking to describe the features of existing or potential audiences so as to market future performances.\textsuperscript{459} Sauter distinguishes this from “reception research,” which seeks to investigate audience members’ intellectual

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{454} See Rhoads, “Performance as Research,” 190.
  \item \textsuperscript{455} Reason, 21–22.
  \item \textsuperscript{456} Ibid, 24.
  \item \textsuperscript{458} See \textit{ibid.}, 23.
\end{itemize}
and emotional experiences of performances. Audience questions need to be simple and straightforward but broad enough to be capable of eliciting “thick” descriptions of experiences that are difficult to articulate. In this study, audience members completed a short survey with open-ended questions seeking to elicit broad responses to the performance and to the text (see Appendix 1). This is a new area of research for biblical studies and Adam notes that although developing criteria for such research might initially feel subjective and awkward, these feelings likely derive from our inexperience rather than from any inherent deficiency in the methods of interpretation.

2.5 A working methodology

The approach adopted by this thesis is to bring a canonical-theological perspective to bear on a close reading of the Psalms of Ascents and then use a performance-critical methodology to enhance theological interpretation of the text. A theological interpretation seeks to allow the nature of the text to determine interpretive strategies. The presentation of the fifteen psalms as a collection with a shared superscription is the foundation for a canonical-theological perspective. The performative nature of psalms provides the impetus for a performance-critical methodology. The goal of transformation of the community of faith is common to the canonical-theological and performance perspectives and is investigated in this thesis by a consideration of how the canonical-performative “reading” of this collection shapes understandings of three key theological elements: anthropology, cosmology, and theology proper.

A canonical-theological perspective takes seriously the impact of the arrangement and ordering of the canonical text. For the Psalms of Ascents, this means

460 Ibid., 118.
461 Park-Fuller, 290.
understanding and interpreting the collection sequentially as a collection and allowing the shared title with its connections to pilgrimage to function as a hermeneutical lens or reading strategy. Therefore, Chapter 3 of this thesis contains an annotated translation of the collection as a whole, paying particular attention to intra-textual connections by maintaining lexical consistency throughout and noticing the use of repeated forms and formulae. The translation seeks to pay attention to performative and aural dimensions of the Hebrew text as well as consider the effect of the superscriptions.

A performance-critical methodology initially attends to the performative nature and features of the text itself. Recent developments in biblical performance criticism prioritise performances themselves as a method of research. Performance of the text allows for an interpretation that is flexible, embodied, communal, and transformative. Therefore, the translation of the Psalms of Ascents was learned and prepared for performance, allowing the interpreter to “inhabit” the text, considering space, movement, tone, and emotion, and providing a feedback loop to adjust the translation if necessary. The translation was then performed multiple times (see Appendix 2 for video) to audiences of members of the Christian community of faith. An innovative development in biblical performance criticism was pioneered by seeking qualitative data from the audience, reflecting on their experience of the performance and theological insights or emphases drawn out by it. Audience members engaged in group discussion and filled in survey forms as a response to the performance. An explanation of this process as well as initial learning gained from it makes up Chapter 4 of this thesis. Theological insights arising from this experience, from both the performer and audience members, are incorporated into the remaining chapters.

Theological interpretation of the Psalms of Ascents is then undertaken in light of these frameworks and methods. The focus is on the constructive theological
contribution of the texts, that is, the effect their canonical presentation has on the community enacting them. Integrating insights from the translation and performance, Chapters 5–8 of this thesis provide a theological interpretation of the collection weaving together the perspectives of anthropo-logic, cosmo-logic, and theo-logic.
PART B: ANALYSIS

Chapter 3: Translation of Psalms 120–134 and translation notes

3.1 Introduction

This chapter contains the text of Psalms 120–134 in parallel columns with the MT set in the right hand column and my translation in the left. After each psalm are notes pertaining to the translation and interpretation of the Hebrew text. This chapter is foundational for the subsequent performances and theological interpretation of the Psalms of Ascents.

The translation seeks to balance two guiding principles: a desire to translate as carefully as possible from the MT – including attentiveness to pronouns, articles, prepositions, numbers, and forms even when they would be awkward in English – alongside a desire to elucidate performative and aural dimensions,\(^\text{463}\) shifting perspectives, and the poetic ambience of the text. Considering the fifteen psalms as a collection, the translation also seeks to demonstrate connections between the individual poems by maintaining consistency in translating vocabulary used throughout the collection, noting the use of repeated forms and formulae, and highlighting distinctive features of the collection compared to the Psalter as a whole. Square brackets have been used within the translation when words have been changed or added in English for reasons related to performances for contemporary audiences.

This translation adopts a tense-prominent approach to the Hebrew verb, understanding the *qatal* verb as past in its core meaning and the *yiqtol* verb as non-past,

\(^{463}\) See Rhoads, “The Art of Translating.”
while recognising poetry can include freer alternation between them. Although recent scholarship has increasingly adopted an aspect-prominent approach to the Hebrew verb, there are still advocates for a tense-prominent approach. In adopting this latter approach, I have found it to work well throughout the translation, providing particular insights into some difficult constructions, and no substantial difficulties were encountered. Note too that if located in the first position in the clause, yiqtol forms are parsed as jussives.

All verse references given are to the MT, which at times differs from English versions in the Psalter due to the treatment of superscriptions. Acknowledging sensitivity to use of the Tetragrammaton, the proper name YHWH is used to translate the Hebrew word יְהֹוָה and to refer to the God of the Hebrew Bible in discussion. Although affirming that God has no gender, masculine pronouns have been used for YHWH, reflecting the convention of biblical Hebrew, a strongly gendered language, as well as the fact that English does not have an appropriate third person pronoun to express personhood without expressing gender.

The shared superscription is considered separately first, due to its importance as a hermeneutical lens and performative frame for the collection.

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468 See Charry, xxvi, for an excellent explanation of this.
3.2 Superscriptions

3.2.1 Translation

A song of the pilgrimage.469

3.2.2 Notes

A song – the noun does not specifically refer to a cultic activity but is used for the general idea of words sung.470 It is a neutral rather than specific term,471 flexible enough to stand alongside alternate descriptors or be augmented by the use of other nouns, similar to the English word “song.”

The noun has no distinct morphological form as a construct noun and so its state can be determined only by context. This is difficult given the grammatical terseness of biblical Hebrew poetry and, in particular, of psalm superscriptions. The noun appears in the superscriptions of another fifteen psalms outside the Psalms of Ascents.472 In twelve of these, the superscription also includes the noun נמותיד and the two terms are usually rendered separately as absolutes, “a song” and “a psalm.”473 In Ps 30:1 it appears to be in a construct chain – with a maqqef in the MT – with the singular nouns חכמה הבהיה. In Ps 45:1 it appears to be in construct with the plural noun ירדריה. Only in Ps 46:1 does it occur as the superscription’s sole genre descriptor.

The strong disjunctive accents on ריי and אמשנהה in Psalms 120, 121, 123, 125, 126, 128, 129, 132, and 134 would tend to indicate that the two nouns should be

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469 With the exception of Ps 121, where the slight variation ישיר ימחנהה is translated as “a song for the pilgrimage.” See section 3.4.1 below.
470 See for example Isa 23:16; 24:9; Ezek 26:13; 33:32; Prov 25:20.
471 G. Brunert, “ישיר,” TDOT 14:626. See also Wilson, The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter, 158.
472 Additionally, the feminine form of the noun appears with the demonstrative pronoun within the historical explanation in Psalm 18’s superscription.
473 Pss 48; 65; 66; 67; 75; 76; 83; 87; 88; 92; 108.
474 Revia magnum and Ole weyored respectively.
taken as two separate descriptors, leaving the precise relationship between the two absolute nouns ambiguous. Thus a viable translation would be “A song. The pilgrimage.” The same sense is expressed in English, however, by the more colloquially worded “A song of the pilgrimage,” a phrase that maintains some ambiguity while flowing more naturally off the tongue. Furthermore, the fact that the accents differ in those psalms that include לֶךִי in the superscription, as well as in Psalm 130 where the first verse is a single cola, tends to suggest that it might be cantillation, rather than meaning, that is determining accent selection in these very short verses.\textsuperscript{475} This way of reading the superscriptions also appears to be supported by the inclusion of an additional Davidic title in Psalm 123 in 11QPs\textsuperscript{8}, with לֶךִי inserted before לֶךִי, that is, “[A Song] of David. For the pilgrimage.”\textsuperscript{476}

Alternatively, if the noun is taken as in the construct state, then it would normally be read as definite due to the article on לֶךִי, that is, “The song of the pilgrimage.” Some have proposed therefore that the superscription was originally affixed to the whole collection rather than the individual songs,\textsuperscript{477} but this proposal would not explain why לֶךִי is singular. Canonically, the phrase is attached to each individual psalm, which means rendering it this way in English is awkward given that there is not one song, but fifteen. It might be that this is an “exception to the construct relation,”\textsuperscript{478} or, more likely, this is a case where the precise grammatical construction is opaque to modern readers. Given the context, it should be rendered in English as


\textsuperscript{477} So GKC, §127e. In 11QPs\textsuperscript{8}, Psalm 133 is separated from the collection but retains the shared title, suggesting that the title was viewed as belonging to the individual psalms forming a collection, rather than belonging to the collection and thus the individual psalms only by virtue of their placement within it.

\textsuperscript{478} Either as a noun of class or a unique appellative, see IBHS, 240–41.
indefinite, so that each psalm is more naturally titled “a” song. This corresponds with how the LXX translates the title.

The substantive is from the verb הָלָה, which has a relatively limited semantic range meaning “to go up,” but also derivatively acquires the technical meaning “pilgrimage.” The noun is frequently used in the singular construct state to designate particular uphill pathways and in the plural absolute state to refer to stairs. The determinate singular absolute is used in Ezra 7:9 to refer specifically to the return from exile but it is unlikely the plural here could refer to one such event. The use of the article suggests reference to some definitively understood “going-ups.”

The two words are therefore best taken together. As in Ps 45:1, where a song of “loves” is understood to refer to a wedding song, the designation here appears to denote a repeated occasion or event: the known ascent of pilgrimage. This might have been the originally intended context of the collection’s use, but just as the historical superscriptions direct the attention of the enacting community to a concrete narrative context in David’s life, so too this descriptor provides later communities with pilgrimage to Jerusalem as a concrete context within which to imagine the theological implications of the text. The translation “pilgrimage” is chosen over “ascents” to bring clarity of imaginative setting to contemporary hearers and audience members, whilst

479 Ὠδὴ τῶν ἀναβαθμῶν (“A song of the steps”).
481 For example, in Exod 34:24; Jer 31:6; Ps 122:4. See Wehmeier, “הָלָה,” TLOT, 2:886.
482 For example, Num 34:4; Josh 10:10; 15:7; Judg 8:13; 2 Sam 15:30; 2 Kgs 9:27; Isa 15:5; Jer 48:5; 2 Chr 20:16.
483 For example, Exod 20:26; 1 Kgs 10:19; 2 Kgs 9:13; 20:9–11; Isa 38:8; Ezek 40:6, 22, 26, 31, 34, 37, 49; 43:17; Neh 3:15; 12:37; 2 Chr 9:18–19.
484 The use of the article also appears to exclude the possibility that it refers to songs that themselves ascend or go up, for example, musically.
485 See Brunert, “סֵפֶר,” TDOT, 14:627; BDB, 752; HALOT, 613.
allowing for possible polyvalence between actual and metaphorical application of the English term.

There is a slight variation to the superscription in Psalm 121, which is obscured in most English translations. This might be a clearer way of expressing the relationship between an indefinite and a definite noun and had this been the superscription on all fifteen songs, much of the above discussion would be rendered moot. As it stands, ל is translated “for” in Psalm 121 to maintain its distinctiveness and highlight its particular appropriateness for the journey.

לַשְׁלָמָה, לְדוֹרֵד Of David, Of Solomon – the preposition ל with a personal name in psalm superscriptions has traditionally been understood as *lamed auctoris*, a claim of authorship. However, the preposition is more commonly translated “to” or “for” and can therefore be understood more broadly as *lamed relationis*, in some way concerning the person named. In the collection, the superscriptions to Psalms 122, 124, 131, and 133 include לְדוֹרֵד and Psalm 127 the more unusual לַשְׁלָמָה.

3.3 Psalm 120

3.3.1 Translation

1 A song of the pilgrimage.

To YHWH in the distress that is mine,

I cried and he has answered me.
“O YHWH, please deliver my life from a lying lip,
from a deceitful tongue.”

What will he give to you, and what will he add to you,
O deceitful tongue?

A warrior’s arrows, sharpened, with burning coals of a broom tree.

Woe is me! For I sojourned in Meshech [a far away land],
I dwelt amongst the tents of Kedar [a people of darkness].

Long has my life itself dwelt with one who hates peace.

I am peace and indeed I speak;
they are for war.
3.3.2 Notes

Verse 1: "יהוה" to YHWH – the opening words of the collection place the focus squarely on the one who is addressed. Many English versions lose both this emphasis and the poetic flavour by moving these words to the stylistically regular location after the verb.\(^{490}\)

"ד發表 distress" – the paragogic מ is frequently found on feminine forms in Hebrew poetry and seems to be primarily for poetic or rhythmic purposes,\(^{491}\) possibly here highlighting the emotiveness of the word. This is the first of a number of examples in the collection where a common word is used with a unique form.

"יהיא that is mine" – the dagesh in the מ is what is called “junctural gemination,”\(^{492}\) which occurs in certain prosodic conditions but also indicates a close syntactic relationship to the previous word.\(^{493}\)

"I cried and he has answered me" – the temporal sequence of this verse has been much debated. It is usually translated with two simple past tense verbs,\(^{494}\) but this does not give any distinction to the wayyiqtol, a verbal form appearing only here in the collection. Although both cry and answer are being recounted, the implication is that the petition currently being described and enacted by the community is based upon a previous answering. The close parallel to Jonah 2:3 gives further weight to this nuance.

Verse 2: "יהוה..." – placing verse 2 in quotation marks makes clear this is the cry referred to in verse 1, as the voice changes from first to second person

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\(^{490}\) CEV, ESV, KJV, MSG, NASB, NIV, NJPS, NKJV, NLT, NRSV.

\(^{491}\) See J-M, §93j; GKC, §90g. Cf. Marrs, “The Šyry-Hm’Iwt,” who translates it temporally, “when I was in distress,” with LXX.

\(^{492}\) Here and also in verse 6.


\(^{494}\) See J-M, §119, n. 19.
address. The vocative placement of the Tetragrammaton is marked in English by the use of “O,” which also conveys the possibility of deferential address.

The imperative could be a further marker of a deferential form of address, that is, mitigating or “polite” language in a direct request from inferior to superior, conveyed here by “please.”

This word is used eleven times throughout the collection and is here translated consistently throughout as “life.” The more common translation “soul” introduces metaphysical ideas foreign to the text, whereas translating merely as a personal pronoun removes the impact of the word.

The parallelism with the image of lying lips suggests these are examples of synecdoche, standing in for speech as a whole.

Verse 3: he give to you – the verb can be read with the tongue as subject and the soul/psalmist as object, or with YHWH as subject and the tongue as object. The latter reading is preferable in the context of the whole psalm and is taken by most commentators. The tongue is most commonly understood as belonging to the enemy, but it could also belong to the psalmist. Thus verse 4 delineates the punishment YHWH

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495 So also RSV, CEV.
497 See ibid., 279. Revell’s work is on narrative but his insights on deferential address can be applied to prayer as a speech form between two parties of different status. The imperative + paragogic is used 97 times in the Psalter for a request made of YHWH (for example, Pss 3:8; 4:7; 5:2, 3; 6:5; 7:7, 8; 8:2; 9:20, 21; 10:12; 12:2; 13:4; 17:1, 7 et al.) and only four other times (Pss 50:7; 57:9; 78:1; 108:3).
498 KJV, NJKV, NASB.
499 NIV, NJPS, ESV, CEV, NRSV.
500 See HALOT, 1244; J-M, §131c, who give this verse as an example of “expressing the quality of a thing.”
501 In either case, the object’s masculine pronoun refers to the ‘owner’ of the tongue/soul.
502 See Hossfeld and Zenger, 301.
503 See comments in section 6.4.2 below as to how performance of this psalm influenced my view of this issue.
will give to those who display these characteristics rather than the proverbial consequences of deceitfulness.\textsuperscript{504}

\textit{he add to you} – the verb is read with BHS as a hiphil, which is therefore translated as active rather than passive.\textsuperscript{505}

\textit{O deceitful tongue} – given the reading of the verse as a whole, this is therefore a vocative rather than a repetition of the subject. The psalmist enters the world of the imagination, speaking directly to their own capacity for evil speech evoked here.\textsuperscript{506}

\textbf{Verse 4: }\textit{with} – the construction as well as the placement of the athnach – the strongest disjunctive accent in this verse – on \textit{שְׁנַנְנֵיה} suggest the preposition does not denote a method for sharpening arrows, but an additional weapon for punishment.\textsuperscript{507}

\textbf{Verse 5: }\textit{woe} – this is a unique form of the interjection, more commonly rendered \textit{ywa}, which is an almost involuntary, onomatopoetic exclamation of grief and despair.\textsuperscript{508}

\textit{Meshech [a far away land], Kedar [a people of darkness]} – it is unlikely these are intended as literal references to geographical locations as the two places are far from one another. Although some have suggested they function as synonyms for “barbarians,”\textsuperscript{509} it is preferable to see their metaphorical function as connected to their distance from Israel both physically and spiritually.\textsuperscript{510} Meshech is

\textsuperscript{504} C. J. Labuschagne, “\‘\ï\í\ject,” TLOT, 2:778, notes that \textit{ןְּגָה} can have the derivative meaning of punishment, which would fit this reading.

\textsuperscript{505} ASV, ESV, KJV, NASB, NKJV, NRSV, RSV all translate as a passive; as does DCH, 156, adapting the verb to a hophal.

\textsuperscript{506} Attempts to associate this verse with an oath formula, for example, Goldingay, 450; Hossfeld and Zenger, 306–7, overstate their case. See Marrs, “The Ṣyry-Hm’lwt,” 13–14.

\textsuperscript{507} So Hossfeld and Zenger, 301. Cf. HALOT, 188, but with no explanation.

\textsuperscript{508} See J-M, §105b; E. Jenni, “\“\“\”\” TLOT, 1:357.

\textsuperscript{509} For example, Leopold Sabourin, \textit{The Psalms: Their Origin and Meaning} (New York: Alba House, 1974), 259.

\textsuperscript{510} See Alter, 436; Goldingay, 452. See also Gerstenberger, \textit{Psalms: Part II}, 319, who argues that the preservation of the psalm for the purpose of later use requires a symbolic or metaphorical reference to maintain meaningfulness.
known primarily for its distance,\textsuperscript{511} while the phrase “tents of Kedar” is used in Song 1:5 as a poetic synonym for black or dark. The translation here is thus explanatory for a contemporary audience who have no imaginative referent for the place names themselves.

**Verse 6:** הַנַּחַל long – this feminine adjective is used throughout the collection as a temporal adverb.\textsuperscript{512}

\[ נַחַל \text{ has (my life) itself dwelt} – the \text{הָנָּה} + pronominal suffix is used reflexively, signifying a state of mind or feeling, giving emphasis to the subject, that is, my life.\textsuperscript{513}

\[ בָּא שָׁיָּה \text{ one who hates peace} – the singular participle is awkward given the plurals in the preceding and subsequent verses,\textsuperscript{514} but alongside the emphatic “she” of my life, the poetic image is tightly drawn, with both the psalmist’s life/soul and enemy personified as individuals.

**Verse 7:** וְּכָנָּה and indeed – the compound conjunction, used only here in the Psalter, makes the syntax difficult and the verse has been variously understood.\textsuperscript{515} Stocks’ analysis of the tricolon convincingly argues the first half of the verse contains two conjoined clauses that can be regarded as independent from the final colon.\textsuperscript{516}

\textsuperscript{511} Marrs, “The Šyry-Hm’lwt,” 24. The emendation of מֶשֶׁ ת to מֶשֶׁ, HALOT, 646, in order to maintain literal geography is unnecessary, as is LXX’s change to a verbal form, ἐμοικρύνθη (“to go far”).

\textsuperscript{512} See J-M, §102c.

\textsuperscript{513} BDB, 515. See also GKC, §119s.

\textsuperscript{514} CEV, ESV, NASB, NIV, NJPS, NRSV, RSV all translate it as a plural.

\textsuperscript{515} The compound conjunction is often read as a concessive, “even though,” or a temporal, “when.” See HALOT, 482; Hossfeld and Zenger, 301. Others have posited textual changes, such as Gunkel, 539, with כ for כ: “I speak peace and truth.” LXX divides the verse at a different point to the MT: μετὰ τῶν μισούντων τὴν εἰρήνην ἡμῶν εἰρήνικος· ὅταν ἐλάλουν αὐτοῖς, ἐπολέμησαν με διορθάν (“With those who hate peace I was peaceable, whenever I spoke to them, they freely waged war against me”).

\textsuperscript{516} Stocks, 71–72, who notes that there is no evidence for a variant text, nor a satisfactory explanation for the presence of כ in the middle of a clause.
3.4 Psalm 121

3.4.1 Translation

A song for the pilgrimage.

I lift my eyes to the mountains; from where comes my help?

My help is from YHWH, maker of heaven and earth.

Let him not give your foot to stumbling, let him not slumber, your guardian.

Look! He does not slumber nor does he sleep, the guardian of Israel.

YHWH is your guardian, YHWH is your shade upon your right hand.

By day the sun does not strike you, nor the moon at night.
Verse 1: I lift my eyes – the yiqtol verbs throughout immediately set this second poem in the collection as non-past.\textsuperscript{517} Although some translations appear to mix present and future tense in this psalm,\textsuperscript{518} the verbs are here translated consistently as present tense.

\textit{From where comes my help?} – there is no interrogative marker, but almost all uses of נאם are found in questions.\textsuperscript{519} The anadiplosis (staircase parallelism) with the next line suggests an immediate answer to a genuine question,\textsuperscript{520} serving to set up the following statement of faith. Punctuation is needed to make clear in English that this is not a relative clause.

Verse 2: my help – this is one of many examples of anadiplosis within the collection, which this translation has attempted to maintain as far as possible.

\textsuperscript{517} LXX accommodates this verse to Ps 123:1, but the distinction between the two should be maintained.

\textsuperscript{518} For example, NASB, NIV, NKJV. It could be that the use of “will” is intended to convey a jussive meaning, however, unfortunately in English this can also be read as future tense.


\textsuperscript{520} See E. Jenni, “ rhoa,” TLOT, 1:95; HALOT, 42.
maker of heaven and earth – this is the first use of this formula in the collection (see Pss 124:8 and 134:3). The two nouns are understood to be a hendiadys denoting the entire creation and thus the plural בְּשַׁמְיָהוּ becomes singular in the equivalent English expression.

Verse 3: Let him not give – the use of לִקְרֹא rather than the previously used לא indicates this verb is to be read as a jussive.521

to stumbling – there is uncertainty as to whether this word should be read as an infinitive construct, a participle, or even a noun.522 The verb, meaning “to totter, shake,”523 is well attested in the Psalter (26 times) and is used again in the collection in Ps 125:1; the difference here between the infinitive and the participle matters little to meaning.

your guardian – occurs six times within this psalm and another six times within the collection. An everyday word meaning “to watch, keep,” it has been consistently translated here with various forms of the English word “guard” due to the latter’s flexibility as both noun and verb.

Verse 4: Look! – the presentative interjection is used in seven of the fifteen psalms in the collection. Miller-Naudé and van der Merwe’s comprehensive study presents a persuasive case that הַנְּה is fundamentally a marker of mirativity, an indication that new or unexpected information is about to be conveyed.524 They categorise the use of this discourse marker throughout the collection as pointing to newsworthy or noteworthy propositional content.525 Mirativity is often conveyed in spoken English by inflection and in writing by an unmarked declarative, but there are a

521 See J-M, §160f; for example, Goldingay, 457. Cf. HALOT, 48, giving this as an example of an “emphatic” indicative.
522 DCH, 207, reads the term (here and in Ps 66:9) as a name for the underworld.
523 BDB, 557.
525 Ibid., 74.
number of adverbs including “Surely” and “Indeed!” which can also take on this function. This translation uses the exclamation “Look!” to translate התנשיה through the collection, which conveys mirativity as well as maintaining the performative (and possibly visual) dynamic of the interjection.

he does not slumber nor does he sleep – the use of לא ינתן as a declaration of fact contrasts with the previous jussive, possibly as a responsive statement.

Verse 7: יִלָשׁנֶה your life – as elsewhere in the collection, “life” captures how this word would have been heard more so than soul, particularly as it is used as object rather than subject.

Verse 8: הַנָּסָרַת going out and coming in – this clause is most naturally read as a merism, highlighting the totality of YHWH’s care. The word-pair is most frequently used in military settings but there are other examples of broader use.

3.5 Psalm 122

3.5.1 Translation

A song of the pilgrimage. Of David. נִשְׁפַּחַת לְכָל־הָאָרֶץ
I rejoiced with those who were saying to me,✥ עֲנַיִיתֵי בֵּאתַמְמוֹם לְךָ
“To the house of YHWH we will go.” בַּיְתָה יְהוֹוָה יְכָלָה:


Our feet were standing in your gates, O Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, [city of peace], she has been built as a city which has been united together to herself,

which there the tribes ascended, the tribes of YH according to the statute for Israel, to praise the name of YHWH.

For there dwelt the thrones for judgment, the thrones of the house of David.

Pray for the peace of [the city of peace] Jerusalem: “May those who love you prosper,

may there be peace in your rampart,
tranquility in your palaces.”

For the sake of my brothers and my friends,
let me please speak peace upon you.

For the sake of the house of Yhwh our God,
let me seek good for you.

3.5.2 Notes

Verse 1: with those who were saying – this word is often translated temporally, “when they said,” yet the progressive use of the plural participle emphasises the ones who said and locates the individual speaker/enactor of the psalm within the experience of the pilgrimage community.

We will go – the verb is commonly translated as a cohortative, but it is not marked as such or placed first in the clause. The simple contrast of past recollection and non-past statement is sufficient to portray the psalmist’s experience. is read as an adverbial locative noun phrase, that is, the destination.

529 For example, ESV, KJV, NASB, NRSV.
530 The term “enactor” is used throughout the thesis for those who use these texts. See section 5.2.3 below for a full explanation.
532 CEV, ESV, KJV, NASB, NIV, NRSV, RSV.
Verse 2: were standing – the qatal verb with the participle is taken as another backward glance, a recollection of the group’s arrival.533

our feet – the LXX and Syriac emend to the singular suffix, but the shift between singular and plural occurs throughout the psalm, locating the individual pilgrim within a communal group – and the later enactor of the psalm within their faith community – and conceivably indicating a performative interplay between officiant and congregation.534

in your gates, O Jerusalem – Jerusalem is addressed directly here and later in the psalm. The English “O” has been used in this translation of the collection to convey direct address. Whether the gates are those of the city or of the temple, the focus is on the group’s entrance or arrival.

Verse 3: Jerusalem [city of peace] – the name of the city is repeated, this time to the listeners. In English, the soundplay between the name of the city and others words in the psalm are lost. The translation for contemporary performance here thus includes the aside “city of peace” to highlight these connections and the possibility that the whole psalm is paronomasia with the city’s name.535

she has been built – it has been proposed that the passive participle has been misread from an original הבניא יה and should be translated “her builder is YH,” which would fit well within the broader picture of the psalm.536 However, the suggestion


534 Gerstenberger, Psalms: Part II, 326.

535 Luis Alonso Schökel and Andrzej Strus, “Salmo 122: Canto al nombre de Jerusalem,” Bib 61 (1980): 234–250. The objection that this is a merely a “folk etiological” explanation of the name, Crow, 45, is not insurmountable – the play on words can be made based on popular understanding or even homonymy, regardless of etymological accuracy.

that the first half of the psalm plays on the idea of “city”\(^\text{537}\) gives at least some reason for the statement as is. The feminine pronoun is retained throughout the collection for Jerusalem/Zion, echoing the personal way the city is both described and addressed.

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\text{which – synonymous with מָם, } \text{this relative marker is used throughout the Pilgrim Psalter and has been traditionally understood to suggest a later date for its collection.} \text{539}
\]

\[
\text{has been united together to itself – the combination of vocabulary as well as the phrasing is unusual. It literally reads as a reference to the manner of the city’s construction, but the term is not used elsewhere for architecture and the pual of התו is used metaphorically in Sirach 13:16 to speak of people staying close to one another, which seems to suggest that the community is more in view here.} \text{541}
\]

**Verse 4:** מִשָּׁנַה which there – the second use of the relative marker is awkward but indicates a continuation of the previous thought, maintaining the focus on the city to which the speakers are going itself, with a series of relative clauses describing its geography, history, and purpose.

\[
\text{ascended – the verb, which is used here with the acquired technical meaning “to go on a pilgrimage,” echoes the title of the collection and clearly links this psalm to the practice of pilgrimage. I have used the past tense for qatal verbs throughout the}
\]

\[\text{Schökel and Strus, “Salmo 122,” 238–39.}\]
\[\text{IBHS, 335.}\]
\[\text{BDB, 979. But see Young and Rezetko; Rezetko and Young.}\]
\[\text{So Hans-Joachim Kraus, Psalms 60–150: A Commentary (trans. Hilton C. Oswald; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 432; Allen, 211.}\]
\[\text{So Donner, 85; Crow, 44. Similarly, LXX reads a noun for תַּטְפַּד and translates it with ἡ μετοχή (“the communion”). Marrs, “The Syry-Him’lwt,” 45, proposes an emendation to תַּטְפַּד, “which he chose for himself,” which he argues is partially supported by 11QPs (תַּטְפַּד) but this is speculative. Matthias Augustin, “Psalms 122 in the Old Testament, in Jewish Tradition, and in Modern Times,” in Proceedings of the Twelfth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, July 29–August 5, 1997, Division A: The Bible and Its World (ed. Ron Margolin; Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1999): 199–207, 204, reveals that this phrase was more recently used a slogan for the modern city, where reconstruction was understood as connected to national identity.}\]
\[\text{Wehmeier, “בְּנֶפֶל,” TLOT, 2:886. Used here and in Exod 34:34; Jer 31:6.}\]
psalm, including here and in verse 5 (dwelt), which might indicate a post-exilic reflection on how Jerusalem once was, but can also be read as a reflection by the psalmist on his own experience as a continuation of the experience of those who have come before, which later enactors of the psalm also look back upon.

יה, יH – the shortened form of יHWH is used a number of times in the Psalter, most frequently with the verb תָּלָה. It appears twice in the collection (see Ps 130:3) and although most English translations render it identically to the Tetragrammaton, the distinction has been maintained here.

ינוהו הנמראת according to the statue for Israel – the meaning of this phrase and how it is connected to the rest of the verse are debated. Booij follows Symmachus (ἐκκλησία τῶν Ἰσραήλ), arguing a preference for scriptio plena and better rhythmical patterns counter the “more difficult reading” presumption. Nonetheless, the variant is not well attested and 11QPs has מנרה יכראה, suggesting a subtler attempt to emend a difficult text. ינוהו is used in the plural throughout Psalm 119 for יHWH’s statutes and the singular form throughout the Pentateuch for the covenant law, so it is best to see the law broadly as the referent here rather than any specific decree. It can be taken as a parenthetical explanation, unusual in poetry, or as a pivot to the next idea, that is, it is both the reason the tribes ascended and the reason to praise.

Verse 5: גֶּםֶאֶה לְפֶתֶשֶׁפֶּהָמָה throne for judgment – the plural is nowhere else used for the throne of Israel, suggesting this phrase functions metonymically, standing for the dispensation of justice.

543 See van Wieringen, 750–51.
544 See Segal, 596.
545 (“congregation of Israel”).
546 Booij, “Psalm CXXII 4: Text and Meaning,” 264–65, suggests the tribes represent all Israel and the congregation the pilgrimage group.
547 Hossfeld and Zenger, 334.
548 The plural is used in Isa 14:9 and Ezek 26:16 but these both refer to foreign powers.
549 See Knowles, Centrality Practiced, 99, who argues that the metonymy remains post-exile as Jerusalem continues to be seen as a place of justice.
Verse 6: יְשַׁלֵּחַ is the usual word for “ask” or “inquire,”[550] but “pray” provides alliteration in English, emulating the poetic resonance of the Hebrew. It is, further, a verb often used in prose to mark direct discourse and paired with the shift to second person pronouns appears to have that function here.[551] יְשַׁלֵּחַ is a key concept, used three times in verses 6–8 and paired with a number of alliterative words, as well as the aural link to יְשַׁלֵּחַ.

“May those who love you prosper” – taking verses 6b–7 together as direct discourse, the clause-initial position of the yiqtol can be taken to indicate a jussive[552] and thus the content of the request in verse 6a is best expressed as a wish or desire. The return to second person feminine pronouns, directly addressing the city, reinforces this sense. Those who love Jerusalem are those who love יהֶוֹה, but the Psalter prefers to use objective periphrases as the object of הבנה rather than the Tetragrammaton itself.[553]

Verse 7: יָשָׂר, יְשַׁלֵּחַ; May there be peace – this is one of only two distinctively marked jussives within the collection,[554] but as with the rest of the Psalter, there are also numerous yiqtol verbs whose position in the clause and context tend to indicate jussive meaning, highlighting the performative nature of these texts.

peace, tranquility – these two words have both aural and lexical association,[555] displaying the straightforward parallelism found throughout the Psalter but infrequently within the collection. Although their English translations do not have

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[554] Noting that many Hebrew verbs do not have a distinctive jussive form. The other one is in Ps 132:10.
[555] See Adele Berlin, The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism: Revised and Expanded (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 107, who gives this word pair as an example of “manifest grammatical and semantic equivalence.”
the soundplay of the Hebrew, their common pairing as synonyms provides imaginative
connections for the contemporary enacting or listening community.

Verse 8: נָא וְלָשֹׁן. Let me please speak – the cohortative form indicates a
desire to speak the following words. The entreating particle appears often with
volitional forms and gives a sense of the emotion present, as well as possibly indicating
a polite or deferential form of address.\(^{556}\)

peace upon you – this could be taken as direct discourse, a formulaic
blessing,\(^{557}\) but it is introduced by the durative הדיב (“speak”) rather than the
instantaneous הד (“say”).\(^{558}\) The sense is thus of continued pleading rather than a single
pronouncement.\(^{559}\) The clear parallelism with the subsequent verse also militates against
direct discourse here.

3.6 Psalm 123

3.6.1 Translation

\(^1\) A song of the pilgrimage.

To you I have lifted my eyes,
the one dwelling in heaven.

\(^2\) Look! As the eyes of servants
to the hand of their masters,

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\(^{556}\) See Revell, *The Designation of the Individual*, 272, n. 10.

\(^{557}\) So Crow, 44.

\(^{558}\) J-M, §111d.

\(^{559}\) See HALOT, 1509.
as the eyes of a [lowly] maidservant

to the hand of her mistress,

so our eyes are to YHWH our God,

until he shows us favour.

3Show us favour, O YHWH, show us favour,

for we have been greatly satisfied with scorn.

4Long has our life itself been satisfied

with the mocking of the smug,

the scorn of the proud.

3.6.2 Notes

Verse 1: To you – this psalm opens with the second person address, placed emphatically, indicating clearly that this is a prayer.

I have lifted my eyes – the prayer begins as that of an individual and, unlike Psalm 121, the verb נשא is qatal, indicating a past action with a resultative state.560

the one dwelling in heaven – is commonly translated “enthroned” here,561 which would be a rare example in the collection of an explicit reference to YHWH’s kingship. However, the same verb is used in the collection for the

560 J-M, §112e. See also Hossfeld and Zenger, 344.
561 For example, ESV, NASB, NIV, NLT, NRSV, RSV.
individual or community\textsuperscript{562} and translating it consistently draws out the possible parallels and contrasts between the location and experience of the community and that of her God. The construction is unusual: a participle with a \textit{hireq compaginis} or connecting suffix followed by a prepositional phrase,\textsuperscript{563} closely binding the ideas together.

\textbf{Verse 2:} \textit{Look!} – see comments on this word in Ps 121:4 above.

Sentences like “… as … so” – the collection tends to use similes, introduced by \textit{כ}, rather than metaphors. The double simile here, with two images in parallel, has a wisdom feel.\textsuperscript{564}

\textit{םנורשא, אולנורשא, שינורשא, שנוןורשא} servants, their masters, [lowly] maidservant, her mistress – the basic image is one of dependence. What is striking about how this double simile works is the variation in both number and gender between the two individual images,\textsuperscript{565} suggesting a classic intensification in the parallelism: the enactors of the psalm are like servants, even more, like a single isolated slave girl,\textsuperscript{566} an intensification expressed here for contemporary performances with the addition of “lowly.”

\textit{שינורשא, רוה} eyes … hand – body imagery is used frequently throughout the Psalter, including numerous times within the collection. It is difficult to tell whether the use here is idiomatic or points to specific functions of the eyes (watching) and hand

\textsuperscript{562}Pss 127:2; 133:1.
\textsuperscript{563}See IBHS, 127–28.
\textsuperscript{564}A similar construction is found in Prov 10:26; 26:1, 2.
\textsuperscript{565}It is possible that there is also a contrast in the status of the servants, with some suggestion that \textit{ןורשא} refers to one “more servile” than the alternative \textit{הנורשא}: BDB, 51, 1046. \textit{ןורשא} is commonly used for Hagar, Zilpah, and Bilhah in Genesis, perhaps suggesting associations with concubines, and appears to be used in Ruth 2:13 as a designation for the lowest female servant, however, \textit{הנורשא} is used interchangeably, albeit far less frequently, for the concubines in Genesis.
\textsuperscript{566}Hossfeld and Zenger, 348, argue that this points to both the community of speakers including men and women, and YHWH having both male and female features.
Either way, ideas of expectation and dependence are conveyed.

until he shows us favour – the relative pronoun is used here as a conjunction and the basis for the request is an appeal to the gracious character of YHWH.

Verse 3: for we have been greatly satisfied – the masculine adjective is used in its regular sense of “much, exceedingly.” The bodily experience of being sated or satisfied with food is used elsewhere as a positive metaphor and so here the translation maintains the surprise twist that what has been filling the speakers’ experience is bitter scorn.

Verse 4: long – contrasting the masculine form in the previous clause, the feminine form is here used as a temporal adverb, bringing with it a reminder of the cry of isolation in Ps 120:6.

our life itself has been satisfied – the singular “life” with the plural pronominal suffix has been maintained despite its awkwardness in English, indicating the flexibility of this key idea, which here refers to the life of the community as a whole.

with the mocking of the smug – the construct chain denotes derision from those who are at ease or secure, captured emotively in English by Alter’s translation choice, “smug.”

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568 BDB, 979; DCH, 443.
570 DCH, 410.
571 For example, Pss 17:15; 63:6; Prov 18:20.
572 This is lost in the NIV, which uses a verb with negative connotations, “endured.”
574 Alter, 442. Phil J. Botha, “Social Values and the Interpretation of Psalm 123,” OTE 14 (2001): 189–198, 193, highlights the honour and shame dimensions of the psalm and observes that these descriptions are of those who make false claims to honour.
of the proud – the plural adjective is unattested elsewhere and the Masorah notes it should be read as two words,\(^5\) making it a superlative construct, “proudest oppressors.”\(^6\) As both maintain the same sense, the former has been chosen as it parallels the previous phrase and accounts for the preposition as a periphrasis for the stative.\(^7\)

### 3.7 Psalm 124

#### 3.7.1 Translation

1. *A song of the pilgrimage. Of David.*

2. If not for YHWH who was for us,

3. let Israel please say,

4. when someone rose against us

5. then they would have swallowed us alive,

6. in burning anger with us,

7. then the waters would have engulfed us,

8. the torrent passed over our life,

\(^5\) One of 15 occurrences written as one word but read as two, Kelley, Mynatt, and Crawford, 192.

\(^6\) BDB, 145, 413.

\(^7\) BDB, 513.
then it would have passed over upon our life, the raging waters.

Blessed be YHWH, who did not give us as prey for their teeth.

Our life is like a bird escaped from a trapper’s snare, the trap was broken and we escaped.

Our help is in the name of YHWH, maker of heaven and earth.

3.7.2 Notes

Verse 1: ַּֽאֹּשׁ if not – the negative conditional conjunction functions akin to a subjunctive, presenting and at the same time dismissing the opposite scenario.

who was for us – the construction emphasises the verb “to be,” with the ָּֽא of advantage. The emphasis in pronouncing the statement should therefore fall on the “was” rather than the more rhythmically natural “for” in English.

578 See also Pss 94:17; 119:92.
580 HALOT, 509.
let Israel please say – this is a performative exhortation, likely from an individual reader/enactor to the community, to participate in the declaration of this song.\textsuperscript{581} Israel is therefore used as an appellation for the gathered worshiping community. The particle, אן, might indicate a polite or deferential form of address,\textsuperscript{582} which could have been appropriately used in a formal, liturgical setting.

**Verse 2:** someone – the reference to an individual can be understood as a generalisation for the enemy,\textsuperscript{583} standing for any and all who are against YHWH and his people.

**Verse 3:** then – this psalm uses a unique form of the common temporal adverb, which has been seen as an indicator of a late date.\textsuperscript{584} The impact on the enactor might be to stress what could have occurred.\textsuperscript{585}

- **alive** – this functions here as an adjectival object of the clause.\textsuperscript{586}
- **they would have swallowed us** – the verb can be used literally (Jonah 2:1) or figuratively (Ps 69:16). The vivid imagery is used elsewhere of devastation by enemies,\textsuperscript{587} which seems to fit the context best here.

- **in burning anger** – this common idiomatic expression is found here in a unique construction, with the infinitive functioning adjectivally.

**Verse 4:** the torrent – another paragogic vowel ending is used seemingly for purely rhythmic purposes,\textsuperscript{588} suggesting a tonal emphasis is appropriate in performance.

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\textsuperscript{581} See Alter, 443; Gerstenberger, *Psalms: Part II*, 333; Schaefer, 303. See also Ps 129:1.

\textsuperscript{582} See Revell, *The Designation of the Individual*, 272, n. 10.


\textsuperscript{584} See BDB, 23; HALOT, 27.

\textsuperscript{585} See IBHS, 667; Gerstenberger, *Psalms: Part II*, 333.

\textsuperscript{586} IBHS, 171.

\textsuperscript{587} BDB, 118. See, for example, Hos 8:7; Jer 51:34.

\textsuperscript{588} J-M, §93i.
some have suggested an original concrete meaning of “throat, neck” could be in view here, but the singular form as in the previous song suggests the word is being used consistently throughout the collection to represent the personified life of the community.

**Verse 5: then it would have passed over** – the exact repetition of a whole clause is unusual within the Psalter, but found a number of times within the collection. Here, the repetition of the verb (singular) even overrides the change from singular to plural subject.

**Verse 7:** Our life is like a bird – the generic term appears to evoke the animal to be hunted, killed, and eaten. The metaphor is used for war scenarios both within the biblical text and in ANE literature.

escaped – the verb, which is repeated, is used in the niphal in war contexts, leaving the agent of the deliverance to be implied. The irreal conditions earlier in the song have faded into the background, with this verse appearing to be a statement of actual deliverance.

### 3.8 Psalm 125

#### 3.8.1 Translation

'A song of the pilgrimage.'
The ones trusting in YHWH are like Mount Zion:
it is not shaken, it dwells forever.

2 Jerusalem! The mountains surround her, but YHWH surrounds his people, from now and until forever.

3 For it does not rest, the rod of the wicked one, upon the lot of the righteous, so that the righteous do not stretch out their hands with injustice.

4 Please do good, O YHWH, to the good, and to the upright in their hearts.

5 But those who turn to crookedness, YHWH leads them away, those who do iniquity.
Peace be upon Israel.

3.8.2 Notes

**Verse 1:** The LXX revocalises as a participle, “the one who dwells,” turning the section into an example of classic synonymous parallelism which, although at home in the Psalter, would be unusual within the collection.

**Verse 2:** Jerusalem! The mountains surround her – the city’s name is placed emphatically followed by the resumptive pronoun, an example of casus pendens or left-dislocation, shifting the tone from the previous wisdom-like saying to a more emotive declaration. This is similarly achieved in English by articulating the name before the image.

but YHWH surrounds his people – instead of another ב to complete the comparison, this might be a rare comparative use of ב, or, more likely, the simile is implicit from the parallelism and the ב is contrastive, affirming YHWH’s protection despite Jerusalem’s vulnerability.

from now and until forever – the BHS apparatus suggests deleting on account of metre, but Stocks makes the case that this performs a marking function in a tricolon. Regardless of whether it is a later insertion into the original poem, in the context of the collection it serves to bind this psalm thematically and theologically with Psalms 121 and 131.

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595 So BDB, 253.
597 Segal, 603–4.
598 Stocks, 111–14.
599 So Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 444, who therefore suggests deletion; Crow, 57 who argues for retention as redactional activity.
Verse 3: ἀρκείαν δὲν ἀνέφασι δoes not rest – the LXX appears to read the verb as a hiphil,\textsuperscript{600} which is the much more frequent form of the verb in the MT.\textsuperscript{601} The MT reading is retained as the more unusual and therefore more likely, although the causative sense would not significantly change the meaning.

the rod of the wicked one – the phrase is difficult due to the abstract noun, usually meaning "wickedness,"\textsuperscript{602} appearing with the definite article.\textsuperscript{603} What is clear is the sense of foreign rule,\textsuperscript{604} whether evoking a specific historical example – perhaps suggested by the use of the singular – or a more generalised idea of oppression.

the lot of the righteous – נורט is used literally for the land as the allotment of the people, which would fit with the suggestion of foreign rulers above. The word can also be used figuratively,\textsuperscript{605} allowing this song to have a broader meaning for later enactors and paralleling the use of a geographical metaphor in the opening of the psalm.\textsuperscript{606}

Verse 4: ἑαυτῷ ... χάρις Please do good ... to the good – another paragogic ἑ could suggest at least some concern for rhythm or speech patterns in enactment of the psalm, or more likely, the polite form of the imperative when making a request of YHWH. The description of the community of faith echoes the request, suggesting ἑαυτῷ is used "religioethically" here.\textsuperscript{607}

and to the upright in their hearts – the appositional phrase is unusual, with the two words appearing elsewhere as a construct chain.\textsuperscript{608} The form here might be another example of the collection using common vocabulary in unique forms.

\textsuperscript{600} ἀρκείαν.
\textsuperscript{601} 104 x hiphil; 29 x qal.
\textsuperscript{602} A few manuscripts have the adjective רעהה.
\textsuperscript{603} Used only here and in Eccl 3:16.
\textsuperscript{604} See Tucker, 105–6.
\textsuperscript{605} For example, Isa 17:14; Jer 13:25; Ps 16:5.
\textsuperscript{606} Cf. Hossfeld and Zenger, 366, who argue that the Persian practice of unjust distribution of land is in view here.
\textsuperscript{607} H. J. Stoebe, "ὥστε," TLOT, 2:492.
\textsuperscript{608} Pss 7:11; 11:2; 32:11; 36:1; 64:1; 94:15; 97:11.
Alternatively, בָּלָהוּ could be understood as modifying חָיוָה rather than חָיוָה, making the cry about the work of YHWH within the inner person.

Verse 5: but those who turn to crookedness – the contrastive וּמִשְׁמַעְתָּם is followed by another example of casus pendens, with the object named emphatically. The adjective is doubly intensive, with a reduplicated stem and a plural.

leads away – the hiphil of יָהַל מִלָּה is used for causing to move but seems to have the nuance here of permanent banishment or death. It therefore further evokes the common wisdom contrast of two ways of life.

those who do iniquity – many translations and commentators take this as a different group of people, reading רַחֲמִי as the preposition “with.” It can be read more naturally as the direct object marker. It is then an appositional phrase, which further poetically describes the wicked as the previous verse does the righteous, with the previous colon functioning as a pivot applying to both parallel lines.

Peace be upon Israel – the concluding formulaic blessing has been described as “syntactically isolated” and “out of place.” In the individual psalm, however, it adds a performative dimension, possibly spoken by a priest, summarising the requests in the poem with the idea of יֶשֶׁת מָלָא.

609 See J-M, §156c; Muraoka, 96.
610 The word is used only here and in Judg 5:6. See BDB, 785; HALOT, 874.
611 See G. Sauer, “כִּֽכְלָה,” TLOT, 1:368.
612 For example, ESV, KJV, NASB, NIV, NLT, NRSV, RSV. See Crow, 55–56.
613 Goldingay, 488.
614 Crow, 58.
3.9 Psalm 126

3.9.1 Translation

1 A song of the pilgrimage.

When YHWH turned Zion’s fortunes, we were like ones dreaming.

Then our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with a shout of joy.

Then they said among the nations, “YHWH is made great in what he has done with these.”

“YHWH is made great in what he has done with us,” we were rejoicing.

4 Please turn our fortunes, O YHWH, like rivers in the Negev [desert].

615 Or, like ones restored to health.

616 Ketiv: קטריב. Where the MT Ketiv and Qere differ, the Qere has been used in this translation, given the focus on orality in this thesis. See also Psalm 129:3.
5 The ones sowing with tears,

with a shout of joy will reap.

6 Though going out he weeps,

the one carrying the bag of seed;

he will certainly come back with a shout of joy,

carrying his sheaves.

3.9.2 Notes

Verse 1: בָּשַׁבֵּץ יי וָי when YHWH turned – the psalm begins with a temporal clause: the preposition + infinitive construct making the time of this action dependent upon the main verb, יָד.617

בָּשַׁבֵּץ יי וָי Zion’s fortunes – the form שָׁבֵץ occurs only here and has been commonly emended,618 but its use in inscriptions from Sefire makes such emendation unnecessary and clarifies its use in the context of restoration.619

we were – the qatal is normally translated as past tense and despite difficulties with what follows, there is no strong reason for doing otherwise here.620

Certainly the issue of time within the whole psalm is significant for interpretation.

617 See J-M, §166l.
618 See BDB, 1000, “but read שָׁבֵץ.” LXX similarly translates it with αἰχμαλωσία (“imprisonment, captivity”).
like ones dreaming – the participle is usually taken to be from the verb "to dream." Beyerlin points out the danger that contemporary understandings of dreams are then read into the simile. What is in view is not the experience of waking and discovering what was thought to be only a dream is actually a reality. The biblical usage of dreams refers primarily to seeing visions of the future, so the speakers of this psalm compare themselves to seers, denoting the joy and vindication they could imagine a dreamer experiencing once their dream comes to pass. It should be noted that the other attested meaning of "to be healthy, made healthy," although rare, could also fit within the context of this psalm, likening the experience of national spiritual restoration to the experience of physical restoration.

Verse 2: בֹּאַ then – the particle followed by a yiqtol verb is used elsewhere with a past – or even preterite meaning, notably for the Israelite community’s song in response to YHWH’s action within history in Exod 15:1 and Num 21:7. Here this sense is in keeping with the overall perspective of verses 1–3.

620 Beyerlin, We Are Like Dreamers: Studies in Psalm 126 (trans. Dinah Livingstone; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982), 27–29, argues that this is a “prophetic past,” comparing the construction of these verses with Job 33:15–16, and therefore interprets the whole psalm eschatologically, but his argument is dependent upon his view of the relationship between this psalm and the book of Joel, which is by no means certain. An eschatological perspective also seems at odds with the collection as a whole. See Hossfeld and Zenger, 371–72; Gert Thomas Marthinus Prinsloo, “Analysing Old Testament Poetry: An Experiment in Methodology with Reference to Psalm 126,” 5 OTE (1992): 225–251.
621 BDB, 321; HALOT, 320.
622 Beyerlin, We Are Like Dreamers, 15–21. His interpretation, however, ends up ignoring the simile so that the community speaks of themselves as though they are dreamers, rather than “like” dreamers.
623 So for example, Cox, 109; Goldingay, 492, who also suggests it could refer to YHWH “having given Israel visionary dreams of restoration from exile.”
624 See Gen 37:5, 9, 10; 40:5, 8; 41:5, 11, 15; 42:9; Deut 13:2, 4, 6; Judg 7:13; Joel 3:1; Dan 2:1, 3. See also Marrs, “The ‘Syry-Hm’iwt,” 82.
625 See M. Ottosson, “םֹל,” TDOT, 4:432. Cf. Scott R. A. Starbuck, “Like Dreamers Lying in Wait, We Lament: A New Reading of Psalm 126,” Koinonia 1 (1989): 128–149, 139, who reads it as a negative simile and grounds for the complaint, that is, they were experiencing the anxiety of seers who awaited to see if their vision will come to pass.
626 As in Isa 38:16; Job 39:4. See BDB, 321; John Strugnell, “A Note on Ps CXXVI.1,” 7 JTS (1956): 239–243. LXX appears to take this meaning of מֹל with ὀς παρακαλημένοι (“those who are comforted”).
627 See J-M, §113i; Crow, 60.
628 See also Josh 8:30; 10:12; 22:1; 1 Kgs 8:1; 11:7.
they said among the nations – the subject is unspecified but the third person can be understood as those within the nations. The use of אֱלֹהִים indicates the following colon is direct speech the psalmist has put into the mouths of those among the nations.

“YHWH is made great in what he has done with these” – the hiphil + infinitive construct used here and in Joel 2:21 is often translated idiomatically as “done great things,” but this makes נצל the primary verb rather than נצל. The former can be understood as an internally transitive hiphil, that is, YHWH has made himself or shown himself to be great. “With these” is grammatically awkward but might reflect an appropriately imagined dismissiveness on the part of the nations regarding the seemingly insignificant people through whom YHWH has demonstrated his might.

Verse 4: Please turn our fortunes, YHWH – the deferential form of the imperative mitigates possible impertinence in making such an audacious request. The phrase נצל נצל occurs frequently in Jeremiah, but careful analysis of its wider usage demonstrates that it refers to broader concepts of restoration and restitution rather than narrowly to the return from captivity, making it an appropriate request for later enactors of this psalm.

like rivers in the Negev [desert] – the comparative simile presents a concrete geographical image for the theme of restoration, the transformation brought by water in the desert. It is presumed that Negev would be unfamiliar to most contemporary audiences and thus “desert” is substituted for performances.

629 So, for example, KJV, NASB, NIV, NJPS, NKJV, RSV. See BDB, 152.
630 GKC, §53d; Hossfeld and Zenger, 371.
631 See comments on Ps 120:2 in section 3.3.2 above.
Verse 6: Though going out he weeps – the syntax is notable with a finite verb between two infinitive absolutes poetically expressing the “simultaneity” of the actions and emphasising the modality rather than the action itself. The repeated verb gives a concessive sense, expressed in English with “though.”

_bag of seed, sheaves_ – the vocabulary is unusual. As distinct from the proper noun in Ps 120:5, the noun translated “bag” is used only here and in Job 28:18. It is omitted in the LXX and Syriac, but occurs in 11QPs. The entire image is another example of the use of common expressions in unusual forms within the collection.

he will certainly come back – the infinitive, written defectively, is emphatic. The use of “certainly” rather than “surely” attempts to replicate a small sense of the alliterative effect of the repeated verb by using two ‘c’ words (see notes on Ps 132:15, 16 in section 3.16 below).

3.10 Psalm 127

3.10.1 Translation

A song of the pilgrimage. Of Solomon.

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633 J-M, §123m.

634 Muraoka, 87. IBHS, 589, observes that the construction might also suggest continuance of the action, which in a metaphorical saying here might serve to affirm its proverbial nature.

635 J-M, §123i.

636 From the verb קָטַב, “to draw”; see BDB, 604.

637 The fact that it is there associated with dreaming is intriguing. See Yair Zakovitch, “What makes an interpretation Jewish? Psalm 126 as an example,” in Jewish and Christian Approaches to Psalms (ed. Marianne Grohmann and Yair Zakovitch; Basel: Herder, 2009): 161–171, 165, for the possibility of wordplay between the two texts, highlighting themes of blessing and abundance.

638 Noted by the Masorah as occurring five times in Samuel and the Writings. See Kelley, Mynat, and Crawford, 185.

639 J-M, §123i.
If YHWH does not build a house,

Futility, the ones building it toiled with it.

If YHWH does not guard a city,

futility, the one guarding watched.

2 Futility is yours,

the ones rising early to arise,

the ones delaying [late] to dwell,

the ones eating the bread of pain.

Thus he gives to his beloved sleep.

3 Look! Children are the gift of YHWH,

the fruit of the womb is a reward.

4 Like arrows in a hand of a warrior,

so are the children of the young.

5 Honoured is the man

who has filled his quiver from them.

They will not be ashamed
for they will subdue enemies at the gate.

3.10.2 Notes

**Verse 1:** if YHWH does not – אָֽקָר לִפְנֵי יִהוּדָה לְאָשֶׁר מְדוּבֵּל אֶת אָשֶׁר is often used for strong affirmations and oaths. The word order emphasises the divine name, placed in the middle of the phrase only in this verse.

אֵֽנִי, futility – the noun meaning “emptiness, worthless things” is placed at the front of each of three successive clauses, drawing attention to it. It possibly functions adverbially to describe the results of the actions, but the jarring poetic prominence of the repeated noun is captured by retaining the ambiguity with its relationship to the rest of the clause in English.

�ֵֽלַי, the ones building it toiled with it – is also linked with ideas of insignificance in Ecclesiastes. The participles are read as substantives and the repeated pronoun is also included twice in the translation, stressing the exertion that was for naught.

ִֽפּוֹרֵר, guard a city – the vocabulary echoes Psalms 121–122, evoking Jerusalem without naming it. The motif of a god building houses and watching over cities occurs in Mesopotamian literature including the building inscriptions of Nabonidus.

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640 For example, Gen 24:8; Num 10:30; 14:28; Jer 15:11; 26:4; Ps 137:6. See Gerstenberger, *Psalms: Part II*, 345.
641 See BDB, 996; DCH, 450.
642 Eccl 1:3; 2:11, 19–21; 5:15, 17; 8:17.
Verse 2: Futility is yours! – the voice changes from third to second person, with the parallel fronted use of א全省 connecting the previous proverbial saying to this more personal exhortation. In performance, this can be highlighted by directly addressing the audience at this point.

the ones rising early to arise, the ones delaying [late] to dwell – the paired participles could be taken with an adverbial sense, but following the previous verse they are here understood as substantives. Their use together possibly constitutes a merism marking out a long day, implying toil beginning early in the morning and continuing until late at night, conveyed to a contemporary audience by the pairing of the common antonyms early and late.

Thus he gives to his beloved sleep – a number of factors make this clause difficult to understand. First, the subject of the verb קֶס is unnamed but the likely antecedent from verse 1 is YHWH. This is affirmed by the possible allusion to Solomon with the use of the noun נָדִיר. Secondly, ק has been understood as the accusative object of the following verb, “this,” referring back to the implied reward sought in the vain efforts. It would seem odd for this to be the gift of YHWH given the negative connotations above. The particle usually functions adverbially, “thus,” although identifying the precise semantic relationship to the previous clause is problematic. Thirdly, the noun נָשָׁה is otherwise unattested in biblical Hebrew. One suggestion that has received some support is a connection to a Syriac or Arabic root meaning “to be high,” but this would make ק contrastive rather than connective. It

644 See HALOT, 34.
645 See Hossfeld and Zenger, 387.
646 See 1 Sam 12:25, where Nathan gives Solomon the name Jedidah.
647 Proposed by J. A. Emerton, “The Meaning of šēnāʾ in Psalm CXXVII 2,” VT 24 (1974): 15–31; see also DCH, 471; Seybold, “Die Redaktion,” 257. In light of the following verse, it has also been suggested that it has connotations of sexual intercourse, but this use of “sleep” is an English, rather than Hebrew, euphemism.
648 Hossfeld and Zenger, 391, point out further that it does not match the “ordinary” character of the whole psalm.
is more likely a variation of הָנַע, which is supported by several manuscripts including the LXX, with the aleph possibly due to Aramaic influence. Finally, הָנַע can be understood either adverbially, “while they sleep,” or as the object of the verb. The former interpretation necessitates reading an implied object or יַע as the object, but again then links the gift of YHWH with the negative connotations of pain. The latter is therefore preferable and sleep might even be a metonym for a “fulfilled life.” In light of all this, the clause is here understood as YHWH’s response to the futility of human effort, his gracious gift of the rest they need. It thus completes the thought of the first half of the poem, providing the contrasting situation to the hypothetical one (א...זא) in which YHWH is not involved.

Verse 3: בֵּן Children – the gender inclusive noun is used throughout this translation for contemporary hearers, even though in its original setting the specific roles sons could perform would most likely have been in view here (see comments in section 7.7.1 below).

Verse 5: יָרָע Honoured – the term is sometimes translated “blessed,” but should be distinguished from יָרָע as a macarism rather than a blessing, with a focus on the individual’s public status. More than a mere descriptive statement, the macarism is a congratulatory word giving honour to the recipient, spoken initially by the psalmist and then in later enactment by the community. The use of this word is often linked to viewing the psalm as wisdom in character.
the man – used to signify a man as distinct from a woman,\(^{655}\) there is also wordplay with נָבָה in the previous verse.

quiver – the second use of archery imagery links the macarism with the previous simile. The vocabulary is unusual, with both נָבָה and likely Akkadian loan words,\(^ {656}\) which underscore the military connotations of the imagery.

they will subdue enemies at the gate – the כּ is understood as explanatory, providing the reason the children are not humiliated, namely, their interaction with enemies. Both נָבָה and can be understood in two different ways. נָבָה can refer specifically to the centre of social and administrative life in a city,\(^ {657}\) or more broadly to the city’s defences.\(^ {658}\) Which sense is in view here depends on the understanding of נָבָה, but in the context of military images and the guarding of the city earlier in the psalm, the reference to enemies here suggests defence. If נָבָה is the common word meaning “to speak,”\(^ {659}\) a legal and social situation would be more likely in mind and then נָבָה would be read as the preposition “with” rather than the direct object marker.\(^ {660}\) Given the preceding military metaphor, it is here taken as the rarer verb meaning “to subdue, destroy,”\(^ {661}\) thus the psalm concludes with the next generation guarding the city\(^ {662}\) and needing to hear the first section of the psalm yet again to ensure this is not done in vain.

\(^{655}\) DCH, 61.
\(^{656}\) BDB, 149; Maximillian Ellenbogen, Foreign Words in the Old Testament: Their Origin and Etymology (London: Luzac & Company, 1962), 45.
\(^{657}\) As in Deut 17:8; 2 Kgs 7:1; Prov 31:23.
\(^{658}\) As in Deut 28:57; Jer 51:58; Mic 1:9.
\(^{659}\) So Goldingay, 504–5.
\(^{660}\) So Alter, 450; Hossfeld and Zenger, 381.
\(^{661}\) HALOT, 209; DCH, 74. See also Crow, 66–68.
\(^{662}\) Stocks, 132, calls this an “alluded inclusio.”
3.11 Psalm 128

3.11.1 Translation

1 A song of the pilgrimage.
Honoured is everyone who fears YHWH, the one walking in his ways.

2 The produce of your hands you will surely eat.
Honoured are you and goodness is to you!

3 Your wife is like a vine bearing fruit in the depths of your house,
your children are like olive shoots, surrounding your table.

4 Look! For in this way will he be blessed, the man who has the fear of YHWH.

5 May YHWH bless you from Zion, that you may see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life.
and may see children for your children.

Peace be upon Israel.

3.11.2 Notes

Verse 1: everyone who fears – common wisdom vocabulary is paired with the indefinite third person object to make this opening colon a statement of broad and fundamental principle.

Verse 2: you will surely eat – this is one of a group of passages where the participle is found between the subject and predicate, which could indicate asseverative rather than simply conjunctive force.

Honoured are you and goodness is to you! – the interjection is rarely found with a second person suffix, making it a vocative exclamation, or better, a pronouncement, of joy and honour.

Verse 3: your wife – the slight variation from the normal form seems to serve no formal purpose, but is another example of the idiosyncratic use of language throughout the collection.

in the depths of your house – the specifier is used elsewhere to refer to the edges of a location and, if it is part of the imagery here, then it would make more sense to picture a vine growing outside the home. The parallelism with the following image suggests it is the wife, rather than vine, to whom this phrase refers.

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663 Muraoka, 161–62.
664 Only here, Deut 33:29; Eccl 10:17.
665 See BDB, 81, who has “O thy happiness!”
666 J-M, §99, n. 2.
667 For example, Gen 49:13; Exod 26:22–23; Judg 19:1, 18; 2 Kgs 19:23; Jer 31:8; Ps 48:3. See also LXX, τοις κλίτσαι της οίκιας σου (“the sides of your house”).
then has the sense of innermost part and could even provide an allusion to female fertility given it is literally the dual form of "thigh."

are like olive shoots – the olive is another tree used figuratively throughout the Hebrew Bible. is a hapax legomenon, evoking the potential for growth of young children, as well as their connection to the older tree.

surrounding your table – the image is of ordinary domestic life,

but like the previous image it is grammatically unclear whether this phrase belongs to the simile ("olive shoots") or to its referent ("children"). If the former, the table would be a metonym for the house and the image thus of a surrounding garden, so it is more naturally read as the children seated at the family table.

Verse 4: Look! For in this way – the causal conjunction used with the interjection adds force or emphasis to the affirmation, while the adverb "thus" makes it clear that verses 2–3 are an example of what follows.

will he be blessed – needing to be distinguished from the verb has stronger theological overtones, given its prominent use in expressing YHWH’s intentions for his people. The pual verb here conveys the act of receiving rather than the state of being that is described by the interjection, with YHWH the implied subject.

the man who has the fear of YHWH – although the noun is indefinite, the English definite article is used anaphorically for the noun phrase because

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668 See, for example, 1 Sam 24:4; 1 Kgs 6:16; Isa 14:15; Ezek 32:23; Jonah 1:5.
669 See Hossfeld and Zenger, 401, who postulate an "erotic association" to the image.
670 See, for example, Isa 17:6; 24:13; Jer 11:16; Hos 14:7; Ps 52:10; Job 15:33.
671 It is found in reference to the cedar in Ben-Sira 50:12.
673 See HALOT, 1520, noting that this is the table of commoners, rather than the royal household.
674 BDB, 472.
675 See Hossfeld and Zenger, 403.
676 For example, Gen 1:28; 5:2; 12:2–3; 22:17; Exod 20:24; Num 6:24; Deut 7:13; 28:3.
the referent (“he”) has previously been identified in the discourse.\textsuperscript{678} The non-verbal clause, with the adjective as a predicative substantive, is retained for emphasis.\textsuperscript{679}

**Verse 5:** יְהֹウェָה בִּלְקָדֶשׁ signalling that you see — the yiqtol at the beginning of the clause is read as a jussive, with the following imperatives then functioning as indirect volitives,\textsuperscript{680} giving specific content to the desired blessing.

\textit{the prosperity of Jerusalem} — the preposition highlights the object of the verb.\textsuperscript{681} The construct chain could mean good for Jerusalem, but the context including the parallelism with the previous verb makes the idea of good coming from Jerusalem more likely.

**Verse 6:** נַעַמְלָי לַעֲבֹדָה meaning children for your children — sometimes translated by the contemporary term “grandchildren,”\textsuperscript{682} this wording retains the poetic feel of the original as well as potentially extending the reference beyond two generations.

### 3.12 Psalm 129

#### 3.12.1 Translation

\textsuperscript{1}A song of the pilgrimage.

Long have they been hostile to me

from my youth,

let Israel please say,


\textsuperscript{679} Cf. CEV, ESV, KJV, MSG, NASB, NIV, NLT, RSV, which all replace the adjective with the verb.

\textsuperscript{680} J-M, §116f.

\textsuperscript{681} See DCH, 408.

\textsuperscript{682} So CEV, NLT, Goldingay, and Allen (grandsons).
2 Long have they been hostile to me from my youth,
yet they have not prevailed against me.

3 Upon my back, ploughers ploughed,
they made long their furrow.

4 YHWH is righteous,
he cut off the cord of the wicked ones.

5 May they be ashamed and turned back,
all who hate Zion.

6 They will be like dry grass on roofs,
which withered before it was drawn,
which did not fill the reaper’s hand
nor the sheaver’s lap.

7 They did not say, the ones passing by,
“YHWH’s blessing to you.”

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683 Ketiv: התשנה. See note on Psalm 126:4 in section 3.8.1 above.
“We blessed you in the name of YHWH.”

3.12.2 Notes

Verse 1: רַגְלָה long – as in Psalms 120 and 123, this word is used adverbially.

Verse 2: יִכְנֶשׁ הַפָּלְפָלָה הַלֹּאֲכָפָה, לאָכָפָה yet they have not prevailed against me – the adverb with a negator acquires an adversative force here. The verb לָכָפָה “to be able” without another finite verb and with the preposition gives the sense of overcoming or prevailing against someone.

Verse 3: יִכְנֶשׁ הַפָּלְפָלָה upon my back – the noun can refer to anything curved and is used elsewhere for the brow of an eye and the rim of a wheel. It is used only here for a person, where the meaning must be determined by the context. Given the broadly attested motif of the back in metaphors for subjugation, this is likely the image here too.

ploughers ploughed – the imagery is deliberately gruesome, picturing a human back gouged by agricultural tools. The corporate dimension further suggests the broader metaphor of foreign oppression, that is, slavery as a forced yoke.

Verse 4: רַכְחָא הַפָּרָגָה they made long their furrow – the hiphil of רָכֲחָא is more commonly used for time but is attested for objects. Further specific agricultural

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684 BDB, 169; HALOT, 196.
685 See also Gen 32:26; Judg 16:5; Jer 1:19; 15:20; 20:10; 38:22.
686 BDB, 146; HALOT, 170.
687 In Lev 14:9 and Ezek 1:18 respectively.
688 For example, Isa 51:23 with לְבֵין (“back”). There is a similar image, “furrows his back,” in the Baal cycle, Part IV, col vi, line 22, where El is lamenting Baal’s death. See Simon B. Parker, Ugaritic Narrative Poetry (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1997), 150.
689 Seybold, Die Wallfahrtspsalmen, 48, even suggests an onomatopoeic dimension to the phrase, with ch-rsch the sound of the plough. LXX loses the agricultural dimension with ἐτέκταινον οἱ ἄμαρτολοι (“sinners contrived, worked”).
690 See Hossfeld and Zenger, 414–15, who show a bas-relief from Edfu picturing a plough drawn by slaves.
691 1 Kgs 8:8 (poles); Isa 54:2 (cords); 57:4 (tongue).
language is used here, referring to the area at the end of the field where the plough is turned.692

**Verse 4:** יִבְרָאָל יְהוָה is righteous – the non-verbal clause interrupts the recounting of hostility with a declaration of YHWH’s character. The rhetorical impact of this colon is accentuated by the placement of the Tetragrammaton at the beginning of the line, the lack of an introductory or adversative particle, the absence of any mention of YHWH prior to this point,693 and the placement of the athnach, all of which serve to highlight the statement.

**Verse 5:** תָּשֻׁתָּא יְהוָה May they be ashamed and turn back – the initial verb could be taken as a yiqtol and therefore a description of what will happen in the future, a declaration of confidence.694 The imprecative nature of the vocabulary,695 combined with the word order, suggests rather that this is a jussive, making this the prayer of the community.

**Verse 6:** יִשָּׁנוּ They will be – the yiqtol form functions as a wish, even a “weakened” curse, where the outworking of the expressed imprecation is implicitly left to YHWH.696

which withered before it was drawn – the form of קֹדֶם is unique in biblical Hebrew697 and an emendation to קֻדֶם (East) has sometimes been proposed.698 Sense can be made of the MT as an adverb, however, particularly given the propensity of the collection to use unique forms. The paronomasia between השֶׁבֶת and בֶּטֶשׁ gives added resonance to the imagery.

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692 DCH, 235.
693 See Goldingay, 517, who observes, “YHWH has been rhetorically and practically missing, but now bursts on the scene.”
694 So ibid., 515.
695 יָאָרָה and יַעֲשֵׂה are also used together in this way in Pss 35:4; 40:15; 70:3.
697 BDB, 870, surmises that it is an Aramaism.
698 So, Gunkel, 560; followed by Kraus, Psalms 60–150, 460.
Verse 7: which did not fill the reaper’s hand – this is taken not as a separate image but as an extension of the above simile, the grass on the roof so insignificant that not even professional reapers would bother to gather it.\(^{699}\)

nor the sheaver’s lap – the verb occurs in the piel only here,\(^{700}\) but likely comes from the noun for sheaf.\(^{701}\) Although the English “sheaver” is awkward, it parallels the unusual agricultural terminology.

Verse 8: They did not say – the effect of translating the qatal verbs throughout verses 6–8 as past tense is to present the wished for scenario from the perspective of it having been completed, highlighting the lack of status and shame resultant for the enemies at the end of the imagined situation.

“We blessed you in the name of YHWH.” – this clause could be read separately as a present tense concluding liturgical benediction to the psalm\(^{702}\) and blessing in the name of YHWH is often a priestly function.\(^{703}\) Given the frequency of direct repetition within the collection and the qatal form, however, it is preferable to read it as a tri-colon continuing the hypothetical non-speech,\(^{704}\) imagining either a double blessing withheld or a response of the harvesters to the passers-by that is not given.\(^{705}\)


\(^{700}\) The only other occurrences of the verb are hiphils in Deut 21:14 and 24:7, both translated as “slave” from the verb meaning to deal tyrannically with. See BDB, 771.

\(^{701}\) BDB, 771; DCH, 333.

\(^{702}\) See, for example, Gerstenberger, Psalms, Part II, 354.


\(^{704}\) See Stocks, 144–45. He proposes that it could also be read as a double entendre, that is, as both the blessing not given to the enemies in the imagined scenario and the blessing given by those enacting the psalm upon one another.

3.13 Psalm 130

3.13.1 Translation

1 A song of the pilgrimage.

From the depths I cried to you, O YHWH.

2 "My Lord, please listen to my voice,

let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications."

3 If iniquities you were to guard, O YHWH,

my Lord, who could stand?

4 But with you is the forgiveness,

so that you will be feared.

5 I hoped in YHWH, my life hoped,

and for his word I waited.

6 My life for my Lord,

more than guardians for the morning,

guardians for the morning.
Wait, O Israel, on YHWH,
for with YHWH is the faithful love,
and greatly with him is redemption.

He himself will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.

3.13.2 Notes

Verse 1: From the depths⁷⁰⁶ – the noun is used only here in the absolute,⁷⁰⁷ suggesting figurative rather than literal (“depths of…””) usage.⁷⁰⁸ The referent of the image is likely still an objective state of trouble or distress rather than a subjective psychological state, a notion probably foreign to the ANE.⁷⁰⁹

I cried to you, O YHWH – the brief colon echoes Ps 120:1 and as there the qatal is translated as past tense.⁷¹⁰ The vocative placement of the Tetragrammaton is conveyed poetically in English with “O.”

Verse 2: My Lord” – the direct address following the act of calling indicates this begins the content of that cry.

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⁷⁰⁶ These opening words, in Latin De Profundis, are a common title for the psalm “because they express a universal experience of despair and lostness,” Patrick D. Miller, “Psalm 130,” Int 33 (1979): 176–181, 177.
⁷⁰⁷ The construct is used in Ps 69:3, 15; Isa 51:10 (with יבּ); Ezek 27:34 (with בּ).
⁷¹⁰ Cf. Crow, 85; Nasuti, “Plumbing the Depths,” 96, who both view it as an iterative present.
please listen to my voice – the imperative of שמעו וו is regularly used for hearing and heeding the voice of YHWH. This “reverse notion” of YHWH heeding the voice of his people occurs fifteen times in the Psalter and only here in the collection. As in Ps 120:2, the long form of the imperative is used, suggesting a deferential mode of speech in making such a bold request.

let your ears be attentive – the word order and parallelism indicate the verb “to be” has a jussive meaning here and the adjective specifies wilful, conscious listening. The motif of “listening ears” is widely attested in Ancient Near Eastern prayer.

my supplications – the noun occurs only in the plural, expressing in prayer an emotional cry for mercy. Derived from מרים, the substantive is effectively an imploration for grace, underlying the need of the speaker.

Verse 3: If iniquities – the conjunction introduces a hypothetical situation, contrary to fact. יִשָּׂע comprehends both sin and its consequences; the plural accentuates the fact that transgression in general, rather than a specific act, is in view.

you were to guard, O YH – the verb is sometimes translated more specifically as keeping record or account, but the use of this word throughout the collection makes it preferable to highlight associations with guarding cities and people, particularly given the image in verse 6. The imagined scenario is therefore that YHWH could choose to “keep careful watch over our waywardness and make sure

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712 See Revell, The Designation of the Individual, 279.
714 See for example, the Limestone stela of Mahwia (c. 15th–14th century BCE), British Museum, London; the Limestone stela of Penbuy (c. 1250 BCE), British Museum, London.
715 See Pss 28:2, 6; 31:23; 86:6; 116:1; 140:7; 143:1; Dan 9:17, 18, 23.
716 Technically, the taqtul form of the hitpael. H. Ringgren, “מָשְׂפַל,” TDOT, 15:650.
718 CEV, MSG, NIV, NLT. See DCH, 471 with “give heed to, pay regard to” as an additional meaning of the verb.
719 See Pss 121:3, 7; 127:1.
none of it escapes.” The *yiqtol* expresses a counterfactual hypothetical, captured in English by “were to.” The shortened form of the Tetragrammaton is not unknown in direct address.721

**Verse 4:** *עָשֲּׂרָה בּּֽהֹדִיקוּ יְוָי* But with you – יֵֽשֶׁ הַיִּֽבְדוּל with a negation often has an adversative sense,722 with the negation here implied from the rhetorical question.723 The clause is polyvalent and can imply emphasis (indeed with you) or contrast (with you and no one else).724

*תַּכְּנֵשׁ is the forgiveness* – the article adds emphasis725 and is therefore translated here despite its irregularity in English.

*לָכַי so that* – the conjunction usually indicates purpose rather than merely result, however the latter is possible.726 The English “so that” seeks to retain this ambiguity, rather than losing the surprise of the possibility that this is a purposive statement.

*תֵּפָּאֲרַנְךָ you will be feared* – the niphal of נָפָל occurs only here as a finite verb but the participle occurs frequently as a descriptor for YHWH.727 The LXX variants appear to be based on a misreading.728

**Verse 5:** יִֽתְּרָא I hoped – the verb is semantically close to trusting and expecting,729 rather than any idea of wish.

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720 Goldingay, 526.
721 See Isa 12:2; 38:11; Pss 68:19; 89:9; 94:12. J-M, §105, n. 14 mention the possibility of this being an interjection known in cognate languages, although this requires ignoring the maqef.
722 J-M, §172c. See Patrick Miller, “Psalm 130,” 180, who suggests the use of the preposition here and twice in verse 7 sets these attributes “almost as intimate friends and companions of God.”
723 See BDB, 473.
724 Hossfeld and Zenger, 435.
725 BDB, 208.
726 See, for example, Ps 51:6. See J-M, §169g.
727 See Exod 15:11; Deut 7:21; 10:17; Zeph 2:11; Pss 47:3; 68:36; 76:8; 13; 89:8; 96:4; Dan 9:4; Neh 1:5, 4:8; 9:32.
728 Instead of וְיִתְפָּאֲרַנְךָ. Rick Roy Marrs, “A Cry from the Depths (Ps 130),” *ZAW* 100 (1988): 81–90, 83, argues for this reading as it “creates interplay” with הבְּדוּל in verse 4 and then reads הבְּדוּל as referring primarily to the promises of YHWH, but this appears to break the colometry of the psalm.
I waited – the parallelism shows that the verbs are close to synonymous. The qatal verbs could have a stative meaning here, expressing a state of mind, but the subsequent simile makes clear the normal experiential sense of the word is in mind and thus a simple past tense describes this experience to the congregational hearers.

**Verse 6:** *my life for my Lord* – this could be read as a non-verbal clause with the possessive, “my life belongs to my Lord,” but the following comparative clearly links it to the idea of waiting. The verb is thus elided and so the image evokes both of the parallel terms and.

more than guardians for the morning – similes are used throughout the collection and one would work here, but the comparative elevates and intensifies the image. The picture of night watchmen longing for morning is underscored by the dangers associated with night/darkness and morning as the time of light and life and thus YHWH’s intervention. The direct repetition is unusual and has been regarded by some as dittography, but repetition is a feature of both the collection and this psalm and hence adds appropriate poetic emphasis here.

**Verse 7:** *Wait, O Israel* – regardless of whether this is a later addition, its function is as a liturgical summons, making the performative nature of the psalm clear.

the faithful love – once again non-verbal clauses articulate key attributes of YHWH, recalling his self-description in Exod 34 and the attitude that underpins

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730 So J-M, §112a.
731 See C. Westermann, “*ljy*,” TLOT, 2:541.
732 For example, Pss 30:6; 46:6; 143:8; Lam 3:23; Isa 33:2.
733 See BHS note.
734 An alternative is proposed by Alter, 456, who reads the first participle as a substantive and the second as a plural verb, thus translating “more than the dawn-watchers watch for the dawn.” This is poetically redolent but difficult to replicate whilst maintaining consistent translation of throughout the collection. Another alternative is proposed by Johannes Tromp, “The Text of Psalm 130:5–6,” VT 39 (1989): 100–103, who reads the repetition as anadiplosis, thus linking the repeated image to the subsequent command: “Like watchmen for the morning, let Israel hope in the Lord!” This would, however, require a second comparative particle.
735 So, for example, Gunkel; Seybold; Crow; Hossfeld and Zenger.
his covenant promises. The article again gives certainty and is included in the English translation to maintain this.

greatly with him is redemption – the hiphil infinitive absolute of רכָּב הָרָא is used as both an adjective and adverb. Here, the word order suggests the latter is in mind, indicating that this description of YHWH is not limited to one action but is a characteristic shown often. The noun occurs four times: in Exod 8:19 as the distinction YHWH makes between the Israelites and Egyptians in the plagues, in Isa 50:2 alluding to YHWH’s deliverance during the exodus, and in Ps 111:9 and this verse as a descriptor of YHWH’s character. Thus its use appears to imply that YHWH’s actions in the exodus demonstrate a foundational attribute.

Verse 8: He himself – the separable pronoun is emphatic and brings the action from the attitude previously mentioned into the current situation.

from all its iniquities – the singular pronoun is reproduced, despite the impersonal nature of “it” in English, as it leaves the scope of the reference open to both individual and national sin.

3.14 Psalm 131

3.14.1 Translation

'A song of the pilgrimage. Of David.

O YHWH, my heart has not been high,

my eyes have not been raised.

736 For example, Gen 15:1, שָׁפָרָה הָרָא (“your great reward”).
737 For example, 2 Kgs 10:18, יְסֶלָה הָרָא (“he will serve him greatly”).
738 Cf. NIV, which avoids gender exclusiveness with “their” but as a consequence potentially loses the corporate dimension.
I have not walked in great things,
in wonders beyond me.

^2No! I have stilled
and quieted my life
like a weaned child upon its mother,
like the weaned child upon me is my life.

^3Wait, O Israel, on YHWH,
from now and until forever.

3.14.2 Notes

Verse 1: הָיְא, “O YHWH” – the Tetragrammaton is placed emphatically, functioning as a vocative and marking the opening of this psalm as a prayer.\(^{739}\)

עָרַמָת my heart has not been high – the qatal throughout verses 1–2 are commonly translated as present tense,\(^{740}\) but the past perspective affirms that these are not claims of the current moment, but descriptions of the ongoing attitudes which form the basis for the prayer. הָיְא is used metaphorically to mean “haughty,”\(^{741}\) but the poetic imagery is retained here as the implication is still conveyed in English (and can be

\(^{739}\) See Hossfeld and Zenger, 447.

\(^{740}\) For example, ASV, CEV, ESV, KJV, NASB, NIV, NKJV, NLT, NRSV, RSV.

\(^{741}\) For example, Ezek 28:2, 5, 17; Prov 18:12. Cf. 2 Chr 17:6 where the phrase appears to be used more positively.
reinforced by gestures in performance).\textsuperscript{742} The heart is a synecdoche for the entire inner being, including the mind and will.\textsuperscript{743}

\textit{מַעֲנֵי נָפַשׁ} my eyes have not been raised – Psalms 121 and 123 start with the affirmation “I lift my eyes,” but the distinction between those positive acts and this negative one is clearly marked by the negator, the different vocabulary, and the different subject of the verbs – the eyes themselves rather than the speaker. The shift of the accent to the ending is an example of hiatus,\textsuperscript{744} here indicated by ending the sentence in translation.

\textit{לְמַעֲנֵי נָפַשׁ} I have not walked – again the physical imagery is retained as the figurative implication of a way of life\textsuperscript{745} is also evoked in contemporary English.

\textit{בְּרֵעוֹם} in great things – the feminine ending is used here to form an abstract noun from the adjective.\textsuperscript{746}

\textit{בְּרֵעוֹם} in wonders beyond me – commonly translated as an adjective,\textsuperscript{747} the niphal participle is predominantly used to refer to YHWH’s miracles or marvellous deeds\textsuperscript{748} and the allusion to his actions is retained in the use of the noun here. The comparative usage of \textit{בּוֹ} is captured in the English “beyond.”

\textbf{Verse 2: \textit{אַל} No!} – after an oath – or here, assertion – this construction marks an emphatic contrast.\textsuperscript{749} This pre-empts the following verbs as depicting one who is righteous rather than wicked. The auditory correspondence and intensification is imitated in English by the use of “no” following the series of “not”\textsuperscript{8}.

\textsuperscript{742} Cf. KJV, NASB, NIV, NJPS, NLT, which choose abstract concepts over the literal bodily imagery.
\textsuperscript{743} See BDB, 523.
\textsuperscript{744} J-M, §80j.
\textsuperscript{745} See BDB, 235. It is particularly notable in Psalms 1 and 119.
\textsuperscript{746} J-M, §134n.
\textsuperscript{747} For example, ARV, ESV, KJV, NASB, NIV, NJPS, NLT; Allen; Alter; Hossfeld and Zenger.
\textsuperscript{748} Significantly, in Exod 3:20; 30:14, and throughout the Psalter.
\textsuperscript{750} See Hossfeld and Zenger, 447, who argue this intensification cannot be imitated in English and so use “instead,” which captures the meaning but loses the sound correspondence.
stilled and quieted – the nuances of these verbs are uncertain, but context makes the imagery clear. The piel of שומא I can mean “to smooth out, make level,” which would here be figurative of a calmed or composed inner being. The piel of שמח II means “to lie down,” which would continue the bodily imagery from verse 1. “Still” evokes this physicality but could stand in for either meaning. מָמוּת means “to become quiet” but is found only here in the poel, which might give it an intensive nuance.

like a weaned child upon its mother – the simile has been variously understood. The basic meaning of the verb נָלַל is “to complete, perfect,” with the derivative meaning of weaning a child. If the young age of the child is primarily in view, then the image can be viewed as a generalised picture of mother and contented child. Others read weaned in the sense of sated, picturing a baby resting after being breastfed. Preferable is the picture of a child who no longer needs breastfeeding, content to lay upon its mother without needing anything from her, as this image fits well with the ideas above of an inner life calmed and not seeking or grasping for things beyond its reach.

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751 DCH, 453; BDB, 1000. See Isa 28:25.
753 DCH, 80, lists this form as a separate meaning, מָמוּת V.
754 Pieter Arie Hendrik de Boer, “Psalm 131:2,” VT 16 (1966): 287–292, argues for understanding the verb as “recompense” and the preposition “against,” thus arguing for a subdued child, one who is not rebellious. However, his analysis does not account for the niphal or participial form of the verb.
756 The passive participle occurs twice in this verse and twice in Isaiah (11:8; 28:9).
757 As in Isa 11:8.
759 Terrien, 843; Hossfeld and Zenger, 451–52; Goldingay, 537, whose reasoning is simply that “the image of a weaned child with its mother is odd!”
like the weaned child upon me – some scholars have proposed deleting this repetition as a scribal error, while others have proposed emendations to the text. The LXX translates the first and second occurrences of "like the weaned child upon me –

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The LXX translates the first and second occurrences of לִבְנָא with ἀπογεγαλακτισμένων ("weaned one") and ἀνταπόδοσις ("reward") respectively. Direct reiteration is common throughout the collection, however, and gives emphasis as well as developing the image through subtle variations. The MT points this second participle as definite, although this is not reflected in most translations. The subject of the preposition and first person pronominal suffix is most commonly understood as the subsequent וְנֹיב, but this understanding introduces a psychological distinction between the “I” and the “soul” that is not suggested by its use elsewhere in the collection. The repetition is therefore more naturally read with the subject of the preposition as the לִבְנָא. This could indicate an original female speaker.

is my life – grammatically this could function as a further description of the subject of the preposition, “upon me, my very life,” but this makes interpreting the image even more difficult. As the word has already been used as the referent for the initial image, the stilled and quieted one, it is better understood in the same way here.


762 For example, Mowinckel, Psalmenstudien (Kristiania: Jacob Dybwad, 1921), 1:165 n. 3; Kraus, Psalms 60–150, 469, who both emend לִבְנָא to לִבְנָא.

763 Bernard P. Robinson, “Form and Meaning in Psalm 131,” Bib 79 (1998): 180–197, likewise attempts to make sense of the parallelism as a pun on the two meanings of the word: “like a toddler on its mother, surely you have coddled my heaving breast.”

764 ASV, ESV, KJV, NASB, NIV, NJPS, NKJV, NLT, RSV all have “a.” NRSV has “the.”

765 See BDB, 753. So ASV, ESV, NASB, NKJV, NLT.


768 The strong conjunctive accent on יֶלֶע would lend weight to this view.

769 Hossfeld and Zenger, 451–52, argue that the relational image means a “space” has been left here, implying the one who is being spoken to – that is “so is my soul with you, YHWH.”
3.15 Psalm 132

3.15.1 Translation

1 A song of the pilgrimage.

Remember, O YHWH, for David,

all his abnegation,

which he swore to YHWH

he vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob,

"May I not enter the tent of my house,

may I not ascend

upon the bed of my chamber,

may I not give sleep to my eyes,

to my eyelids, slumber,

until I find a place for YHWH,

a sanctuary for the Mighty One of Jacob."

Look! We heard it

in Ephrathah [the region of David],

...
we found it in the fields of Jaar [the forest]

7 Let us enter his sanctuary, let us bow down toward his footstool.

8 Arise O YHWH, to your rest, you and your mighty ark!

9 Let your priests be clothed in righteousness, and let your faithful ones sing for joy.

10 For the sake of David your servant, do not turn from the face of your anointed.

11 YHWH swore to David truthfully, he will not turn from it, “From the fruit of your belly,

I will place on your throne."

12 If your children keep my covenant, and my statute that I will teach them,

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770 The plural is understood as intensive rather than of number, see note on this verse in section 3.15.2 below.
even their children forevermore,

they will dwell on your throne.”

13 For YHWH chose Zion,

he desired her for his dwelling.

14 “This is my rest forevermore,

here I dwell, for I have desired her.

15 Her provision I will abundantly bless,

her poor I will satisfy with food.

16 Her priests I will clothe with salvation,

and her faithful ones will jubilantly sing for joy.

17 There I will make grow

a horn [of strength] for David,

I have arranged a lamp for my anointed.

18 His enemies I will clothe with shame,

but on him, his crown will flourish.”
3.15.2 Notes

Verse 1: דֵּי יָהָ֖ו for David – the person YHWH is called upon to remember is the historical David, but the action sought is not for his benefit. It is, rather, for those making the request. Thus the ל indicates something like “for David’s sake.”[771]

all his abnegation – the pual infinitive construct is extremely rare[772] and is used here as a noun.[773] The meaning is from the verb חָנֹּן II, “to be afflicted, humbled,”[774] which is used of David in 1 Chr 22:14 regarding his expenditure on the temple. לֶּכֶם makes it clear such a single action is not the focus here,[775] but rather his attitude of self-sacrifice,[776] illustrated by what follows, in establishing Zion. The use of an uncommon English word here, “abnegation,” parallels the unusual nature of the Hebrew.

Verse 2: אֶתְּהוּ דִּ֖בֶּר לָהֶּֽ יָהָ֖ו which he swore to YHWH – is used of David making oaths to Jonathan,[777] Saul,[778] Shimei,[779] and Bathsheba,[780] but there is no account in the Hebrew Bible of David swearing such an oath to YHWH. This could therefore be an imaginative, poetic account, or reference to a customary practice.[781] Note, this psalm

[771] Hossfeld and Zenger, 460. It is treated here as with the use of לָדִי in Psalm titles, which is understood similarly as this kind of connection rather than as a statement of authorship.
[773] DCH, 334.
[775] The reference is often taken to mean David’s preparations for building the temple, however, this would make the basis of the whole psalm a call to YHWH to remember a vow that was unfulfilled. See Elizabeth Huwiler, “Patterns and Problems in Psalm 132,” in The Listening Heart: Essays in Wisdom and the Psalms in Honor of Roland E Murphy, O Carm (ed. Kenneth G. Hoglund et al.; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987): 199–215, 208.
[777] 1 Sam 20:3, 17.
[778] 1 Sam 24:23.
uses the standard relative pronoun בְּ, rather than the form בְּ more commonly used throughout the collection, which has led to considerable debate over its dating.\textsuperscript{782} 

bְּ, the Mighty One of Jacob – בְּ can be used more literally for a bull, potentially introducing ideas of male power and fecundity to the epithet.\textsuperscript{783}

**Verse 3:** כֹּלֶה הָאָדָם, "May I not enter" – the content of David’s vow is introduced as first person direct discourse,\textsuperscript{784} which could be conveyed in performance by a different speaker or by change in tone of voice. The form of the oath is an unfinished curse, “if I enter,”\textsuperscript{785} with the negative consequences left unspoken, best expressed in English by the self-imposed negative command.

bְּ, tent of my house, bed of my chamber – again the terms form classic synonymous parallelism, with each construct chain referring to an individual element that is part of a larger whole.\textsuperscript{786}

**Verse 4:** כָּלָה כָּלָה, sleep to my eyes, to my eyelids, slumber – one who does not sleep is one who is devoted, watching (see Ps 121:4, which uses the two cognate verbs). Again, there is no record of David making such a vow, but the idea of a monarch sacrificing sleep to build his god a temple is known from Mesopotamian literature,\textsuperscript{787} including similar parallelism in the temple hymn of Gudea of Lagash: “To build the house for his king / he does not sleep by night / he does not slumber at midday.”\textsuperscript{788} The chiastic nature of the phrasing is maintained.\textsuperscript{789}


\textsuperscript{783} Niditch, *Oral World*, 15–17.

\textsuperscript{784} See Meier, 47.

\textsuperscript{785} See Conklin, 39.

\textsuperscript{786} IBHS, 153.


\textsuperscript{789} Cf. ASV, ESV, KJV, NASB, NIV, NLT, NRSV.
Verse 6: הָּנָּה Look! – the particle marks an abrupt change in the direction of discourse, as well as forming a cohortative call by the first person plural group who will now speak and thus, we can now assume, were speaking in verse 1.

וַָּאָנָּה we heard it in Ephrathah [the region of David] – the third person feminine suffix on the verb has no immediately obvious antecedent. The subsequent context most naturally suggests the ark is in view, despite the grammatical gender discrepancy. Ephrathah is used as a name for the area of Bethlehem, so that David can be called the son of an Ephrathite. Thus the “we” identify themselves with those who received news while located in Bethlehem, putting later enactors into the position of hearing about the ark for the first time. For contemporary audiences, the term “the region of David” is used to evoke the same ideas, within members of the community of faith assumed to have previously heard of Bethlehem as the “city of David.”

וַָּאָנָּה we found it – again, despite the gender discrepancy, the “it” is most naturally understood to be the ark. The verbs העָּנָּה and חָּנָּה are not synonyms, but instead refer to a progression of events: hearing leads to searching and finding.

וְָאָנָּה in the fields of Jaar [the forest] – the parallelism suggests this is a second proper noun, evoking the plural יֵרֵהַ of the place where the ark was located for a time. Thus the psalm dramatises, even possibly imagines re-enacting, the

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791 Ruth 4:11; Mic 5:1. Thus it is unnecessary to identify it with Kiriath-Jearim, as suggested by HALOT, 81; BDB, 68.

792 1 Sam 17:12.

793 The scenario being imagined is the time before David took the ark to Jerusalem.

794 See BDB, 421.

795 1 Sam 7:1–2. See HALOT, 1143.
movement of the ark from Kiriath-Jearim to Jerusalem. Given that the specific place is not named and the fact that it may be unfamiliar to a contemporary audience, the phrase “fields of the forest” is used for performance to evoke both the literal referent of the name and the sense of a change in location.

**Verse 7**: his sanctuary – the plural is understood as intensive, or a plural of majesty, thus translated as singular in English.

_toward his footstool_ – is an Egyptian loan word, picturing YHWH as a king. The preposition indicates direction rather than location.

**Verse 8**: Arise O YHWH – although the long form of the imperative is likely used in deference as elsewhere in the collection, “please” has not been used here as the nature of the request – a call for YHWH to take his rightful place rather than a plea for personal assistance – means its insertion in English would give the implication of permission being needed rather than conveying a tone of respect.

_to your rest_ – this is usually understood as a call for YHWH to enter Jerusalem in ritual re-enactment. Although this would make this the only place where is used after the verb to indicate direction of movement, it has been translated as such here. An alternative would be to understand the preposition the same way as in verse 1, “for the sake of,” with referring, as made explicit in verse 14, to Zion.

**Verse 9**: Let your priests – the initial placement of the noun, the suffix of personal relationship to YHWH, and the separation of the people into priests and saints

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796 So Schaefer, 314; Bellinger, 124–25; Goldingay, 548–49.
797 As in Pss 43:3; 46:5; 84:2. See Hossfeld and Zenger, 455.
798 Ellenbogen, 66.
799 Cf. ASV, ESV, KJV, NASB, NIV, NLT, RSV, which all have “at.”
800 Pss 120:2; 125:4; 126:4; 130:2.
802 See Huwiler, 204.
803 This would make the call to YHWH one to war or intervention on behalf of his people, rather than a call to cultic movement.
could emphasise a postexilic distinction between priests and laity. In the context of the collection, it could also be the distinction between priest and pilgrim that is alluded to. Given the previous imperative and the word order, the two yiqtols in this verse should be read as jussives.

\[\text{be clothed in righteousness} - \text{the passive is used rather than “wear” to keep lexical consistency with the use of the word in verses 16 and 18.}\]

**Verse 10:** \(\text{for the sake of David your servant} - \text{there has been debate as to whether this verse belongs to what precedes, making it the conclusion of the same petition, or what follows, making it a second request.} \)

It clearly marks a transition and parallels verse 1 in invoking David’s name paired with a request. Thus, verses 1 and 10 could form an inclusio, or verses 1–9 and 10–18 parallel sections. In direct speech by YHWH, David is referred to as “my servant” repeatedly and so this request recalls YHWH’s own designation as the basis for its plea.

\[\text{Do not turn from the face} - \text{the hiphil of \(\text{בשה} \) is used idiomatically with \(\text{חסן} \) to mean refusal or rejection, but is here translated “turn” to retain the resonance with the emphatic declaration in the subsequent verse.}\]

**Verse 11:** Verses 11 and 12 are twice the length of every other verse in the psalm. Despite the difficulties in interpretation noted below, they are usually understood as containing two bicolon each, due to the perceived regularity of the poem. The MT

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804 See Gerstenberger, Psalms, Part II, 366.
806 So Allen, 273; Bellinger, 126; Schaefer, 313. See also Gianni Barbiero, “Psalm 132: A Prayer of ‘Solomon,’” CBQ 75 (2013): 239–258.
808 For example, 2 Sam 3:18; 1 Kgs 11:13, 32–38; 2 Kgs 19:34; 20:6; Jer 33:21–22; Ezek 37:25; Ps 89:4, 21; 1 Chr 17:4.
809 For example, 1 Kgs 2:16, 20; 2 Kgs 18:24; Isa 36:9; Ezek 14:6. See HALOT, 940; BDB, 999; Crow, 101.
810 See Stocks, 167–68, who observes, “Those looking for (or assuming) metrical regularity will read v 11 as a double bicolon; those looking for tricola will read v 11 as such.”
places the *athnach* – the main division – after the third colon, syntactically highlighting the key words of the promise, which occur in grammatically identical forms.

truthfully – the substantive is understood as functioning adverbially.811

*he will not turn from it* – the wording corresponds to terminology in Ancient Near Eastern vassal treaties, most closely to the treaty between the fourteenth century BCE Hittite Šuppiluliumas and Mattiwaza.812 “the word which comes out of his mouth will not turn back.”813 The feminine pronominal suffix is understood to refer to the implied oath.

“For the fruit of your belly ...” – the repeated יִשְׁרָה יִפְתָּח could be read appositionally, making this clause the explanatory equivalent of the one above, particularly if it is the conclusion of a tricola. In order to supply an object for the final colon’s key verb, it is better to understand the יִשְׁרָה partitively, alluding to “some” or “one” of David’s offspring.814 The shift from third to second person for David provides further evidence for reading this colon with what follows. The image of David’s “womb fruit” is difficult to capture in English but highlights the physical and psychological connection between him and his offspring.815

*I will place on your throne* – the change to first person speech indicates a shift to the voice of YHWH, poetically articulating the content of his oath.816

The object of יְשַׁשֶּה is understood to be the “one” from the fruit of David, rather than the

811 BDB, 54; J-M, §102d; Muraoka, 133. Cf. Crow, 101; Kraus, Psalms 60–150, 481, who take it as the subject of הבט, “a sure oath.”
814 BDB, 580. A missing word is sometimes supplied for clarity or metrical reasons. For example, Gunkel, 569, inserts יָכַפ, Fretheim, 289, מַכְפַּל, Kraus, Psalms 60–150, 473.
815 J-M, §140b states that because this is said of a man it must mean “your fruit of womb” rather than “the fruit of your womb.” However, a similar image is used in Mic 6:7 without a feminine subject.
816 Cf. 2 Sam 7:14–16.
throne itself, and would thus be heard by later enactors as referring to any contemporary descendant. Despite the feminine pronominal suffix, the throne clearly belongs to David.

**Verse 12:** and my statute that I will teach them – the legal term is used throughout the Psalter, particularly in Psalm 119, and occurs within the collection in Ps 122:4. The form here is unusual, neither the regular singular or plural. It is used for the document presented to the king at his coronation, which is plausibly in view here, and thus the English singular is used to allude to such specificity. The demonstrative pronoun is used here as a dependent relative pronoun.

even their children forevermore – this phrase forms the apodosis to the condition introduced by לְאָם. The superlative construction of בֵּן indicates no end to the generations envisaged.

they will dwell on your throne – the grammatical parallelism with the final colon of the previous verse emphasises the key affirmation: the establishment of the Davidic reign. As the apodosis of a conditional statement, the yiqtol verb is future, not jussive.

**Verse 13:** For YHWH chose Zion – the preposition is commonly used with בַּעֲר for the object of divine election.

**Verse 14:** This is my rest forevermore – the initial placement of the demonstrative might indicate emphasis. The repeated emphasis on perpetuity contrasts with David’s temporally bound oath in verse 5.

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817 לָ֣א only ever used with לָּא for the indirect object: see Gen 4:25; 30:40; Pss 21:4; 140:6; Job 14:13; Prov 22:17. It is possible that לָּא is being used intransitively in order to emphasise YHWH’s action here, however this would be difficult to express in English. See Cameron Sinclair, “The Valence of the Hebrew Verb,” JANES 20 (1991): 63–81, 76.
818 See BDB, 730; DCH, 311.
819 J-M, §94g; HALOT, 791.
820 2 Kgs 11:12; 2 Chr 23:11.
821 IBHS, 336; DCH, 97–98; J-M, §145c.
822 BDB, 103; DCH, 44.
823 J-M, §154fb.
here I dwell – the parallelism is clear with another emphatically placed adverb, followed by a repeated verb.

I will abundantly bless – the infinitive absolute followed by the finite verb is used for affirmation, highlighting the certainty of the promise. The alliterative effect of the repeated verb is copied with the use of “abundantly,” the emphasis falling on the “b” sound providing aural as well as imaginative connotations with blessing.

I will satisfy with food – the second noun refers to the means of the verbal predicate. YHWH’s blessing of Zion is here intensely practical. דֶּאֶרֶךְ, more literally “bread,” is a synecdoche for food.

Verse 16: I will clothe – the verb is repeated from verse 9, but the change to the hiphil places emphasis on YHWH’s causative action.

with salvation – given that the words of verse 9 are repeated here with only minor changes, the substitution of this word for מְסַפֵּר appears significant. The two words are often found in parallel expressions, but the change appears to shift the focus from the result of the divine action to the saving activity of YHWH itself.

will jubilantly sing for joy – as in the previous verse, the infinitive assures the action and the adverb “jubilantly” has been chosen for its alliterative and imaginative connections to joy.

Verse 17: There I will make grow – the emphasis on Zion is repeated by the placement of the locative. The verb is used literally for plants sprouting, as well as metaphorically for the flourishing of salvation.

825 IBHS, 176.
827 HALOT, 1546, suggests מ might also have temporal significance here, but no where else in the Psalm is a specific point in time alluded to. For both initial and later enactors of the psalm, these words surely point forward, but the emphasis is on the surety of the promises for all rather than any indication of a specific historical event.
829 2 Sam 23:5.
a horn [of strength] for David – the common image of a horn represents strength,\textsuperscript{830} with the explanation added for contemporary audiences to aid understanding of the imagery. It is used only here with David, who stands in for his descendants whether narrowly (future kings)\textsuperscript{831} or more broadly (the nation).\textsuperscript{832}

I have arranged – the qatal verb stands out in the midst of three yiqtols, suggesting this action, unlike the others, has already occurred. נָבְלָה and נָבְלָה are also used together in 2 Sam 23:5, forming part of David’s “last words” declaring what YHWH has promised to him.

Verse 18: his crown will flourish – נָבְלָה is part of the king’s adornments of his office\textsuperscript{833} and it is also used for the high priest’s headpiece.\textsuperscript{834} This could indicate a merging of the two traditions in attributing the features of one to the other.\textsuperscript{835} נָבְלָה is used for the blossoming of plants,\textsuperscript{836} making it difficult to determine whether the image here is some kind of budding crown or whether the word is used idiomatically for gleaming.\textsuperscript{837}

3.16 Psalm 133

3.16.1 Translation

\textsuperscript{1} A song of the pilgrimage. Of David.

\textsuperscript{830} HALOT, 1145.
\textsuperscript{831} Hossfeld and Zenger, 466.
\textsuperscript{833} See 2 Sam 1:10; 2 Kgs 11:12/2 Chr 23:11.
\textsuperscript{834} Exod 29:6; Lev 8:9.
\textsuperscript{835} See Hossfeld and Zenger, 466–67, who accept as “possible” that the psalm is attributing priestly features to the king but “rather unlikely” that it wishes to assign kingship to the high priest.
\textsuperscript{836} DCH, 377.
\textsuperscript{837} Alter, 461.
Look! How good and how pleasant
to dwell, brothers and sisters, even together.

Like the good oil upon the head,
going down upon the beard,
the beard of Aaron [the high priest],
which goes down
upon the opening of the garments.

Like the dew of Hermon,
which goes [all the way] down
upon the mountains of Zion.

For there YHWH has commanded
the blessing:
life until forever.
3.16.2 Notes

Verse 1: Look! — the use of the particle to open this psalm has been considered “redundant” given the following word, but it serves as a reminder that the speaker of the psalm has an audience and is calling for their attention, as well as indicating the possibly unexpected nature of what will be said. Psalm 134 opens in the same way.

Verse 1: how good and how pleasant — the interrogative has an exclamatory function, similar to Song 7:7, opening the psalm with a sense of wonder. The two adjectives together emphasise the idea of delight above any ethical overtone.

Verse 1: to dwell ... even together — the verb is used throughout the collection in a variety of forms. It can mean permanently living or staying for a time. Given the previous psalm’s use of for YHWH’s dwelling place and the mention of Aaron later in this psalm, it is possible the dwelling envisaged here is that of the gathered community in Zion. The two adverbs, “also together,” are awkward and found together only here. gives a sense of emphasis or exaggeration, suggesting the focus is on unity when it might not otherwise be assumed.

Verse 1: brothers and sisters — most translations supply a preposition, but this is unnecessary and can obscure the poetic feel. This translation leaves open the

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838 Gerstenberger, Psalms: Part II, 371. Given the brevity of these poetic texts, it seems unlikely that the first word of a poem would be included with no purpose.
839 See comment on miratitivity above in section 3.4.2.
840 See J-M, §161a. LXX reads these as genuine questions.
841 This “lyric discourse” of “thoroughgoing aesthetic character” is in fact the only claim made in the whole psalm. Frederick W. Dobbs-Allsopp, “Psalm 133: A (Close) Reading,” JHS 8 (2008): 2–30, 4.
843 See BDB, 443.
844 gives a sense of emphasis or exaggeration, suggesting the focus is on unity when it might not otherwise be assumed.
845 Muraoka, 143.
846 CEV, ESV, MSG, NIV, NLT, NRSV, RSV (when); ASV, KJV, NASB, NJPS, NKJV (for).
possibilities that this is a vocative address or a comparative. Whether the term is used literally or figuratively here has been the subject of considerable debate. Proposals range from physical brothers,\textsuperscript{847} to the brotherhood ethos of those working together,\textsuperscript{848} to the brotherly pilgrim community at feasts and festivals.\textsuperscript{849} Given the superscription, the use of בְּנֵי in the previous psalm, the emphasis on unity added by בְּנֵי, the mention of Aaron later in the psalm, and the frequent use of the plural noun for the community,\textsuperscript{850} it seems the gathered community is most likely,\textsuperscript{851} which is also how the psalm could be understood and used by later enactors. In modern English, this reference is thus best conveyed by the inclusion of both gendered terms.

**Verse 2**: בְּנֵי נַחֲלָת Aaron [the high priest] – the repetition or anadiplosis is not unexpected in the collection, but how this colon is to be understood is not immediately obvious.\textsuperscript{852} It could be read with what follows as a comparative in its own right, thus presenting a second simile of a lengthy beard.\textsuperscript{853} There is no comparative particle to suggest this, however, and it would turn the key image into that of movement rather than attaching significance to the quality of what is being poured and all that evokes.\textsuperscript{854} It is preferable, therefore, to read it as in apposition to the above, thus extending the image by specifying that the beard already described belongs to Aaron.

\textsuperscript{847} Gunkel, 570. See Deut 25:5.
\textsuperscript{850} For example, Lev 25:46; Num 25:6; Deut 15:7; 17:20; 18:15; Judg 20:13; 1 Kgs 12:24; Isa 66:20; Jer 29:16; Hos 2:3; Ps 22:23; Prov 6:19; Esth 10:3; Ezra 3:8; Neh 10:30. Also Ps 122:8, the only other time the word is used in the collection.
\textsuperscript{851} Adele Berlin, “On the Interpretation of Psalm 133,” in *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry* (ed. Elaine R. Follis; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987): 141–147, 142, goes even further, arguing the phrase is only used for undivided land holdings and thus the picture here is the reunified kingdom.
\textsuperscript{852} BHS suggests perhaps deleting it along with the following cola. It is dismissed as a gloss, for example, by Kraus, *Psalms* 60–150, 484, saying that it “interrupts the parallelism”; Seybold, *Introducing the Psalms*, 499–501. Many other commentators view it as a later addition to the psalm.
\textsuperscript{854} See David T. Tsumura, “Sorites in Psalm 133, 2–3a,” *Bib* 61 (1980): 416–417, who sees this as an example of poetic sorites – climax and gradation – that highlights the word pair “oil” and “dew.”
There is no evidence the historical Aaron was particularly well known for his beard, therefore the reference most likely evokes the cultic setting – the anointing of the high priest particularly in light of the title. The explanation is therefore added for contemporary performances to evoke connections to other cultic ideas within the collection.

which goes down – the antecedent to this relative clause could be the beard or the oil. Although is in closer proximity, the key image seems to be flowing, which makes it more likely that this refers to the oil, and this makes more sense in the context of the whole psalm.

upon the opening of the garments – used for clothes is normally masculine and so this has been understood as an intensive plural of meaning measure, and thus referring to Aaron’s whole body. This does not account for the presence of . The anatomical term for mouth is also used figuratively for the collar of Aaron’s high priestly garment in Exod 28:32 and is thus read this way here.

Verse 3: which goes [all the way] down – the added words for performance guard against a pedestrian image of an everyday meteorological occurrence being evoked for a contemporary audience, hinting at the geographical distance between the two mountains.

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855 Cf. Arnold B. Erlich, Die Psalmen (KHAT; Berlin: M. Poppelauer, 1905), 348, who proposes that Aaron’s beard was well known for its particular beauty!


857 Dobbs-Allsopp, 13, notes that the only other time ינב is used in connection with a beard is a reference to spittle running down the beard in 1 Sam 21:14. J. P. M. van der Ploeg, “Psalm CXXXIII and its Main Problems,” in Loven en geloven (N. H. Ridderbos Festschrift) (ed. M. H. van Es and C. Houtman; Amsterdam: Ton Bolland, 1975): 191–200, 192, points out that it would be an “untolerable truism” [sic] to say that a beard extends to the collar.

858 Dobbs-Allsopp, 27. The Targum interprets the image as the lower hem of the garment, see Edward Cook, Targum Psalms. This makes the image one of super-abundance.
The image appears impossible, given the distance from Hermon to Zion. Alternate readings have been conjectured, but without textual evidence. It is best to read this as theological geography, possibly expressing a belief that dew from Hermon was the source of sustenance for all the land and emphasising the receiving of blessing at Zion. 

For there – the adverb could refer to Zion or to the dwelling together in verse 1. The latter is more likely, stepping out of the simile to complete the thought of the poem. In light of the title, both can be understood as Zion is the place where it is hoped such unity will occur among the faith community.

YHWH has commanded the blessing – יִזְכֹּר נְאֵנָה is the only finite verb in the psalm, with the qatal translated as past perfect in English to make clear this action is anterior to the entire description provided throughout the poem. The use of יִזְכֹּר with בָּרָה in the Psalter is unusual, but the two are used together in the Pentateuch in reference to physical sustenance.

life until forever – this clause can be read in apposition, specifying the content of the blessing commanded by YHWH. The plural of יָבוֹא is usually understood as an abstract plural of duration, although here it could emphasise the quality of community life. The time descriptor differs from the formula in Pss

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861 J-M, §136j, suggests it is a “plural of generalization,” whereas Hossfeld and Zenger, 481, parallel this with Ps 87:1 (םֵבָרָה) as a “mythicizing description” of Zion. Keel, “Kultische Brüderlichkeit,” 73, n. 21, reads it as an intensive, or plural of majesty, furthering his idea of a polemic.
862 יִזְכֹּר, a region further north – see Gunkel, 571; HALOT, 816; נַעֲרָה, an alternate name for Hermon used in Deut 4:48 – see Sabaourin, 386; and נִבָּה (parished land) – so Alter, 463; Kraus, Psalms 60–150, 484.
863 The image of dew, falling from heaven, onto Hermon, down to Zion parallels the oil, poured out, onto the head, down to the beard and collar.
864 The adverb is also used in Pss 122:4, 5; 132:17 to refer to Jerusalem.
865 See Dobbs-Allsopp, 22–23, who also comments on the soundplay with יִזָּכַר in verse 1 and the way כִּי provides an answer to the poem’s initial exclamation.
867 יָבוֹא is missing from 11QPs, perhaps to avoid any hint of eternal life.
868 The alternative is to read it as a separate concluding word to the psalm.
121:8; 125:1; 131:3 as נֵלֶס is definite, but this should not be over-interpreted. Here it means full, long life rather than later ideas of eternity.

3.17 Psalm 134

3.17.1 Translation

1 A song of the pilgrimage.

Look! Bless YHWH,

all YHWH’s servants,

those standing in the house of YHWH

by night.

2 Lift your hands toward the holy place and bless YHWH.

3 May YHWH bless you from Zion,

maker of heaven and earth.

3.17.2 Notes

Verse 1: הֲנָה Look! – as in the previous psalm, the deictic exclamation has sometimes been treated as unnecessary given the following imperative, but it links this psalm

870 Cf. Hossfeld and Zenger, 482, who see the article as indicating the breaking in of the “eternity of God’s time” into the festivals of Zion.
871 See Dobbs-Allsopp, 21–22.
with the previous poem, particularly given the use of קְרִבּ at the end of Psalm 133 and in the opening line here, as well as rhetorically reinforcing the subsequent directive.

*all YHWH’s servants* – this designation is used in the Psalter for all who worship or call on YHWH; only the following specifications clarify it is being used in a narrower sense here.

*those standing in the house of YHWH* – the participial phrase is definite, further describing the servants named above. More than merely not moving, connotes appearance at a place in readiness for the purpose of being there. Although this could refer to all those gathered for worship, it is more naturally read as referring to those who serve regularly in the temple. The building itself, rather than the courts around it.

*by night* – the plural could be intensive, or a plural of composition (encompassing all parts/watches of the night), but is best understood as referring to habitual, or “nightly,” service. This perspective adds weight to the suggestion that the ones being addressed are the priests. Although there is no evidence of night-time sacrifices in the Hebrew Bible, there were no doubt other duties for priests after the end of the day-time worship. Particularly in light of the superscription and the poem’s place at the end of the collection, it appears this is a liturgical farewell. The extended

872 Gunkel, 573, among others, considers it a scribal error due to the influence of Psalm 133. It is ignored completely by CEV, NCV, NIV and merged with the imperative into “Come” by ESV, MSG, NRSV, RSV.

873 See Ziony Zevit, “Psalms at the Poetic Precipice,” *HAR* 10 (1986): 351–366, 358, who also comments that “if Psalm 133 could be characterized as never really ending, this psalm may be described as never really starting.”

874 See, for example, Pss 34:23; 90:13; 102:29.


876 Cf. LXX, which inserts ἐν ἀυλαῖς οἴκου θεοῦ ἡμῶν (“in the courts of the house of God”) likely transposed from Ps 135:2.

877 The “depth of night,” so Mowinckel, *Psalmenstudien*, 5:46, n. 5.

878 J-M, §136b.

879 Although it is possible that *Mishnah, Sukkah* 5:1, refers to night rituals; and there is a reference by Hecateus, cited by Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1.200, to rituals performed “both nights and days.”

880 1 Chr 9:27–33. See Alter, 464; Goldingay, 572.

881 See Hossfeld and Zenger, 486.
description insinuates that the initial exhortations are offered to the priests, by the people.883

Verse 2: וְקָרֶא toward the holy place – the noun on its own is used to designate the Holy Place, where the priests alone may go,884 and its placement most likely indicates direction toward,885 similar to the more complete articulation in Ps 28:2.

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884 For example, in Exod 26:33; 28:29, 43; 29:30; 31:10; 35:19; 36:1–3; and in Pss 20:3; 63:3; 68:18, 25.
Chapter 4: Performance

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research process undertaken in learning and presenting the translation of the Psalms of Ascents as a performance. The process included learning the translation in Chapter 3 by heart, reviewing the translation to convey the impact of some of the text’s imagery and aural dimensions more clearly, considering how to use the performance space, choosing deliberate gestures to use for various phrases and words within the collection, modulating the use of tone, pitch, and pace throughout performance of the collection to evoke different voices as well as different emotions, receiving and analysing feedback from the audience as to the impact and effect of the performances, and reflecting on the experience of being the performer of these texts.\(^886\) This process can be appreciated and understood more fully by viewing the attached video of a performance of the collection (see Appendix 2).\(^887\)

In this chapter, I describe what I did and analyse what I learned from memorising the text for performance, from performing the text on multiple occasions, and from receiving audience feedback on the performances. The style of writing used for this chapter is adapted from the practices of autoethnography\(^888\) and performance ethnography, both of which centre on a “rhetorical self-reflexivity.”\(^889\) Autoethnography is “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience.”\(^890\)

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\(^{886}\) There is some artificiality in separating these elements, which often overlapped in the actual experience of performance, but this has been done here for clarity of reading.

\(^{887}\) It is important to realise, however, that a video recording can never fully capture all the dynamics of a live performance.


\(^{889}\) Conquergood, 193.

ethnography utilises observation and participation in performance to reflect on the processes of performance in order to discover ways of knowing that move beyond the cognitive by including the intuitive, experiential, embodied, and affective.891 This chapter employs an adapted performance autoethnography, seeking to reflect on the performance and embodiment the text and its implications by developing a “thick description”892 of my own experience.893

4.2 Learning the text

4.2.1 Internalisation

My starting point for performance was learning the translated text. This was initially done using words written on a page, practicing a form of rote memorisation, one psalm at a time. Repetition of the text brought familiarity but also a sense of the “whole,” that is, how long each psalm is, how it moves from beginning to end, any connections or repetitions within it. The next step was to experience what biblical performance critics call “internalisation” of the text,894 knowing not only the words but also the movement and emotions of the text. This was again learned by practice, saying each psalm with different emphases, walking around and initially allowing free movement of my hands and body as felt natural and appropriate, before developing specific gestures for repeated words and phrases or key ideas.895 Difficult as it is to explain, there was certainly a point in time when these psalms were “owned” and became “mine,” that is, I

894 See Ward and Trobisch, 70; Rhoads, “Performance Criticism—Part 1,” 125.
895 Some initial attempts to teach psalms to others have also suggested that it is easier to learn by hearing accompanied by gestures/bodily movement, than it is by reading words.
engaged with them with my emotions and imagination as well as my understanding and
the words became my own. There was also a point in time at which it became clear that
I knew them as a collection; I could speak them in any order and could begin to hear
and know the connections between them. This became even more apparent in actual
performances. For example, in the first performance, one psalm was unintentionally
missed out, but when performing the next two psalms, my mind and body immediately
knew that there were words and movements that should have come before and had not.
In a later performance, when a single line was accidentally skipped, I experienced the
ability to continue on with the performance while simultaneously considering the effects
of inserting the skipped line after the current one, assessing that the overall impact
would be the same and thus including it.

The next step was to consider how best to convey these words to a listening
audience. I experienced this part of the process somewhat differently from the initial
memorisation. I could feel the emotions of the text and used gestures naturally to
convey them, but I found I had to slow down and “watch” myself to discern how an
audience would see or hear what I was expressing. Movement and gestures needed to be
developed from my natural body language and expressions into deliberate performance
choices. Emotions that I was feeling needed to be conveyed in both my voice and face.

As well as performing my translation of the entire collection, I decided to learn
and perform the first three psalms of the collection in Hebrew. This would enable the
audience to hear the aural connections, particularly in Psalm 122, and experience the
tone and feel of the original language. This was also a way of enabling me as the
researcher to connect with the ancient and later Jewish transmission and performance of
these texts. This memorisation took longer than the English and was done by listening
to chants as well as learning the Hebrew text visually. Having experienced the emotions

896 This included watching videos of my own practices and performances.
of the text in English, there were points where this experience was heightened by hearing myself speak the words in Hebrew. Aural dimensions of these psalms were certainly highlighted, leading to a few adaptations being made in English translation in attempts to convey the poetic feel (see section 4.2.2 below). A specific issue was encountered in the spoken use of the Tetragrammaton. When reciting from the Masoretic Text, the unpronounceable הַוָּה was spoken as Adonai. In the English performance, however, my translation of הוהי as YHWH was pronounced as “Yahweh,” maintaining the connections with the two shortened uses of the name in the collection (יהויה Yah,” Pss 122:4; 130:3) as well as the distinction from יהוה, “Lord.” Several audience members noted the prominent use of the divine name, with some questioning the different choice made in the two languages. Thus, even though each decision made sense in context, it seems that the combination of the two different approaches to the Tetragrammaton might have had an unintended effect of over-emphasising the difference between the English and Hebrew.

The process of internalising the text allowed me as the interpreter to hold its cognitive, affective, and imaginative dimensions within myself simultaneously and to feel the import and impact of the words as if I were speaking them. There is certainly a sense in which these psalms have now become part of me.

4.2.2 Revision of the translation

My initial translation endeavoured to bring out performative features of the text, but remained relatively literal. I altered a number of specific words and images for

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897 The word יהוה itself does not appear in the first three psalms, meaning there was no need to draw a distinction between the two terms. However, the shortened form יה occurs in Psalm 122:4 and was spoken in Hebrew as “Yah.”

898 In the weeks and months since the research performances, I have been asked on occasion to share one or more of the Psalms of Ascents (in both English and Hebrew) on the spot, leaving no time for revision or practice. I have found that the text is still “there” within me, which is quite different to my experience of, for example, speeches or talks that I have memorised by rote on other occasions.
performance – and some of these were further clarified over the course of multiple performances – to meet the needs of my audiences. This process operated as a hermeneutical circle\textsuperscript{899} rather than a simple linear movement from translation to performance to interpretation; the performance itself influenced the translation. Alterations made due to performance as a result of this process are found in square brackets in the translation of each psalm in Chapter 3 above. Broad differences between a contemporary audience and ancient Israelites were considered; for example, geographical knowledge and understanding. Consideration was also given to what I understood or assumed specific audiences knew.

I had initially planned to translate the title as the more literal “a song of the ascents.” Given the canonical perspective taken in this thesis, that the title provides a hermeneutical lens linking these psalms to the practice of pilgrimage, whether actual or metaphorical, I changed the translation for performance to “a song of the pilgrimage.” This provided audience members with an interpretive frame through which to imagine the setting of these psalms for themselves.

I made alterations to the translation after hearing and performing the text out loud to provide the audience with some sense of the aural poetic or alliterative effect of the text. When performing Psalm 122 in Hebrew, for example, it became apparent that the repeated \( \text{"y"} \) sounds binds the poem together for both performer and audience, even if the contemporary audience did not understand the meaning of the words. The familiarity of most audience members with the sound of the words Jerusalem and shalom meant that they were able to hear connections between these words in the Hebrew. I slightly amended the English translation of Psalm 122 after the first performance, therefore, with the addition of “city of peace” in verses 2 and 6 to connect

\textsuperscript{899} See Gadamer, 303–6.
the name of the city to the words ישלי and נער. In verse 6, the more literal translation of “ask for the peace” was changed to “pray for the peace” to provide alliteration.

I adapted some geographical references within the collection to enable contemporary audiences to understand something of the impact of the images and the emotions they might have evoked for earlier hearers. Meshech and Kedar in Psalm 120 became “a far away place” and “a people of darkness” to enable the contemporary audience to experience the sense of distance and isolation evoked. Ephrathah and Jaar in Psalm 132 became “the region of David” and “the fields of the forest” to provide a contemporary audience with the connections that would likely have been drawn between the place and the ark as well as the sense of movement between two different places.

Geographical imagery within the collection was also elucidated. In Psalm 126, for example, “desert” was substituted for “Negev” to illuminate the power of the metaphor with its implications of unexpectedness and abundance when imagining rivers flowing in such a place. I attempted to evoke the distance between Hermon and Zion for the audience in Psalm 133 with the addition of the words “all the way,” hinting at the superabundance of the image.

Other images were given explanation for contemporary audiences. In Ps 133:2, I used the descriptor “the high priest” after the name of Aaron to link the image to the Old Testament temple on the assumption that the majority of the audience’s level of biblical literacy would enable these words to help them subconsciously make that connection. In Ps 132:17, “of strength” was inserted after “horn” to express the meaning of the image and in Ps 123:2, the word “lowly” was inserted before “maidservant” to ensure the intensification of the parallel images (see section 4.6.2 above) was heard by contemporary audiences unaccustomed to imagining slaves and servants.
Other small additions were made to relate to the specific audiences of the performances. In Ps 128:2, “the produce of your hands” was subtly expanded to “the produce of your own hands,” making the language slightly more colloquial for Australians and thereby evoking the idea of blessing through self-sufficiency, which might be unfamiliar to many urban dwellers. In Ps 127:2, I changed “delaying to dwell” to “delaying late to dwell” to connect the image used with the way a long day is more commonly referred to in contemporary Australian English.

Repetitions of the same verb in two different forms for emphasis in Pss 126:6; 132: 15, 16 were originally conveyed in meaning only by use of the word “surely.” For performance, I substituted each of these with an adverb that has subtle alliterative connections to the finite verb to provide some aural connection as well: “certainly come back” (Ps 126:6), “abundantly bless” (Ps 132:15) – with the vocal stress in both words on the ‘b’ – and “jubilantly sing for joy” (Ps 132:16).

Many literal aspects of the collection that have often been smoothed out in translations for reading were retained and explored in performance. For example, although the opening words of the collection refer to YHWH, the shift to first person in verse 2 led me to speak Ps 120:1 directly to the audience, before moving to addressing a prayer heavenward in verse 2. In Psalm 130, the change from first to third person at verse 5 was retained, with my eye contact and address shifting from heavenward to the audience directly, rather than waiting until Israel is specifically named in verse 7. In Psalm 130, the definite article was retained for the abstract concepts of forgiveness (v. 4) and faithful love (v. 7) and in the performances it appeared to convey an implied contrast between the unspoken alternative, thereby emphasising the gracious character of YHWH. Like poetry, spoken performance does not require the use of grammatically precise language and in fact missed words or ambiguous connections between ideas can
be allowed to provide their own potential nuances. For example, in Psalm 129, the intervention of YHWH in response to the experience of oppression between verses 3 and 4 is more powerfully conveyed by the use of tone, pause, and gesture than by simply adding the word “but.”

Considering these texts from a performance mode of thought reshaped my initial translation of them. I sought to understand how the text seeks to influence hearers’ emotions and imaginations and attempted to provide a translation that would have a similar effect on my audiences. The collection as a whole became a progressively unfolding experience for me and I sought to provide that same experience for the audience. The translation contained in this thesis has been refined to some extent by these experiences, but would no doubt be fine-tuned further if it continued to be used in future performances outside the scope of this research.

4.3 Performing the text

4.3.1 Use of the performance space

My performances enacted the text without using props or sets of any kind, but embodiment of the text requires movement and so the use of the physical space taken up by the performance became significant for interpretation. The performances took place in four different venues,\(^900\) with varying physical dimensions in both width of the staging area and height of the ceilings, as well as varying heights of the performance area due to one or more steps.\(^901\)

A number of factors within the collection indicated the need for space to be used contrastively. These included the general journeying idea of pilgrimage, the naming of

\(^{900}\) All were church and theological college buildings. See Appendix 1 for details.

\(^{901}\) The fourth performance (M) took place in a much smaller space than previous performances and I observed afterwards that unfortunately the physical limitations had led to an unconscious employment of more restrained gestures and emotional expressions as well.
places far away and of Jerusalem, and the contrast between the wicked/nations and the righteous/Israel. In my performances, therefore, one side of the space used was chosen to represent distance/darkness/other and the other side to represent centre/light/Israel. Given the cultural pervasiveness of the linking of left with bad and right with good, I decided to use the audience’s left side (stage right) as the place of distance or darkness and the audience’s right side (stage left) as representing Jerusalem, making use of any possible subconscious connections of the same.

A decision was then made as to where each psalm would take place. I staged the opening psalm of the collection, with its sense of alienation and distance, at the furthest point on the audience’s left, with hand gestures pointing into the left side distance when referring to “them” in the final verse. In performance spaces where there were enough steps to give a sense of height contrast, this location was also as low as possible. Psalms 122 and 134, which both mention the location of the temple in Jerusalem, were staged at the furthest point on the audience’s right, with the wall of the performance room on this side functioning in my imagination as the entrance gate to the temple. Again, in performance spaces with varying stage height, the highest vertical point was chosen for this location as well. Psalms 121, 126, and 132 all have a sense of movement within the individual psalm and so I staged these in the middle of the performance space with physical action corresponding to spoken ideas of turning or journeying. Psalms 124 and 129 both speak of Israel’s enemies and so were staged closer to the audience’s left.


903 In one of the performance spaces (T) an archway on that wall looked similar in size and shape to the arches in the southern wall I have stood under in the Davidson Archaeological Park in Jerusalem, allowing me as the performer to imagine I was actively looking at them.
allowing the idea of lament taken place at a distance to be insinuated. The remaining psalms took place somewhere between the poles of left and right.

Many psalms within the collection address the audience or God directly, while others speak more to the self. I therefore decided to use the front and back of the performance space to evoke a sense of closeness or nearness. Psalms 123, 127, 128, and 133 all directly address the audience and so took place toward the front of the stage, making eye contact with the audience at relevant points of the poems. During Psalm 128, for example, where possible I addressed a specific man I knew or could see to be a husband or father when speaking the similes about “your wife” and “your children” in verse 3, while during Ps 127:2 when speaking to “you” who gets up early and stays up late, I also chose a seemingly appropriate individual audience member to address directly with each phrase.

Sections of psalms that directly address YHWH were spoken heavenward, taking a backward step during Ps 130:3 when asking who could stand before the Lord. In places where the psalmist seemingly addresses the self (e.g. Pss 120:3; 131:2), I used downward glances and gestures as well as lowered voice to convey ideas of self-reflection.

This simple imaginative use of the performance space allowed me to gesture or look toward each side to evoke the emotions of each. It also led to many audience members feeling they were able to “see” locations for themselves, Jerusalem in particular. The spatial dimensions of the collection and the idea of them taking “place” was frequently commented on by audience members (see section 4.4 below).
4.3.2 Gestures and body language

Gestures can be used to convey subtext as well as to emphasise features of the text. For these performances, my focus was on the latter. Gestures were deliberately chosen and practiced, as it became clear that although I often use my hands to speak, many of my regular gestures are similar to one another and they are not used consistently. Learning the gestures was another step in both owning and interpreting the text. It also became clear that once the gestures were clearly linked in my mind with the words, they led to a sense of “bodily memory” whereby parts of the performance could be repeated without conscious thought. The text had been learned not only by heart but also by body.

References within the text to body parts provided an obvious starting point for choosing gestures: looking up when the psalm referred to the lifting of the eyes, touching my lip when it was referred to, holding out my hand when it was named, and gesturing toward and moving my feet when they were mentioned. Various words or phrases are repeated in the text and so gestures were chosen to highlight these for contemporary audiences. All the different forms of the word הֲנָח “guard” were accompanied by a protective gesture with arms crossed in front of my body. The repeated word שלום “peace” was given a simple one hand moving downwards gesture, designed to convey calm, with my left hand used to connect it to stage left where Jerusalem was imagined to be located. The word ברך “bless” was complemented by raising both hands toward heaven, palms facing inward. This allowed variations when the blessing was given to יהוה (e.g. Ps 124:6), with my hands moved upwards, and from יהוה to the gathered people (e.g. Pss 128:5; 134:3), with my hands moved down toward the audience, leading one audience member to reflect on the sense of having a benediction pronounced upon and offered to them to conclude the performance. The contrast in translation between this word and the macarism כְּרָאוּ “honour” was further
emphasised in the performance by a parallel gesture but with my hands turned outward, seeking to evoke the sense of status being given by the community.

The repeated formula “maker of heaven and earth” with its dual spatial connotation was conveyed by the use of one hand raised up and the other lowered down, while both were moved to convey the dynamic of creating. Similarly, the repeated temporal phrase “now and forever” was accompanied by a dynamic gesture, this time with my hand moving from near the body to further away in rhythm with the words to evoke the sense of time passing. Many audience members commented on the memorability of the consistent use of these gestures. In Ps 121:7, the phrase “going out and coming in” was accompanied by the movement of both arms out from and back into my body, allowing the image to convey travel – whether literal or metaphorical – in any direction being guarded by YHWH. In Ps 126:2–3, the distinction between the two uses of the phrase “YHWH is made great” was highlighted by cupping both hands around my mouth and facing toward stage right when speaking the words of the nations, then cupping a hand around my ear and facing stage left when echoing the words heard by Israel.

Both body language and gesture were also used to refer to persons mentioned in the text. As well as looking up when directly addressing YHWH, I pointed a finger heavenward when referring to the Lord. A number of references to Israel’s enemies were accompanied by a dismissive wave of the back of my hand toward stage left, whereas the audience were invited to include themselves as the righteous and those trusting in YHWH by a welcoming cupping of my hand toward myself and stage right. Similarly, in Psalms 122 and 133, two open hands indicating the audience accompanied references to “brothers and sisters”.

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I chose gestures and facial expressions to complement particularly emotive words or images. In Psalm 120, both המָּשׁ “distress” and קָנָה “woe” were highlighted by the use of a clenched hand to my body alongside the emotion being conveyed by both my face and voice. When יהוה was implored deferentially in prayer, my hands were clasped together in a posture of pleading request. In Psalm 124, the engulfing waters passing over were underlined by moving a threatening hand above my head accompanied by my face and voice conveying fear. During the opening of Psalm 127, the actions of building and guarding were accompanied by well-known hand movements indicating construction that were then drawn down to open palmed emptiness when the word מָלַך “futility” was spoken. The uniting together of both the city (Ps 122:3) and the community (Ps 133:1) was stressed by joining my hands together with interlocking fingers, while the surrounding of the city, people (Ps 125:2), and table (Ps 128:3) was matched with the forefinger of each hand moving in a circle to evoke the connotations of inclusion and embrace. The image of a ploughed back in Ps 129:3 was emphasised with a hunching over of my whole body as well as scraping my fingers downwards to reiterate both the strangeness and brutality of the word picture; the abrupt rescue of יהוה who “cut off the cord” was imitated by a sudden sharp chopping motion of my hand.

Other images were accompanied by gestures to illuminate connotations that might not be readily apparent to contemporary audiences. The אָשֶׁר “rod” (Ps 125:3) of the wicked was clarified by a whipping gesture, the results of reaping and carrying sheaves (Ps 126:5–6) were evoked by full arms, and the movement of oil poured upon the head and going down on the beard and the garments (Ps 133:2) was demonstrated in action. Although it was in practice impossible to explain ובש לְבָנָה “a weaned child” (Ps
131:2), the idea of contentment was portrayed by smiling down at an imaginary child being rocked in my arms.

The thoughtful use of gesture and body language became a significant part of my interpretation of the text, as well as a key method of communicating its import and affect to the audiences.\textsuperscript{904} Gestures enabled me to interpret whom different lines were being spoken to, by, and about, to express the emotions of the text, and to convey the impact of significant and repeated ideas. The use of bodily gestures also assisted in my own internalisation of the collection as a whole, as well as in audience members’ remembrances of the performance.\textsuperscript{905}

4.3.3 Tone, pitch, and pace

Much of the transformative power of the performed text is found in its ability to connect emotionally and imaginatively with the hearers. This is largely done by the use of the voice, particularly tone. Interpretive choices, particularly as to subtext, are also made by the pace of delivery including the use of pauses.

Allowing emotions to be heard in my voice as a performer was something I found could not be forced. Sounding distressed or joyful seems to come from actually feeling a level of distress or joy. Entering into the emotions of the text for myself therefore became an important part of performing. I allowed myself to feel the distress and isolation of the opening psalm, then drew on my own life experience of standing outside the walls of Jerusalem to express the wonder and delight of Psalm 122. With prayers pleading to YHWH, I allowed my voice to break slightly as I expressed these

\textsuperscript{904} One audience member participated in two different performances, but in the first was sitting in choir stalls to the side of the performance stage. She commented on the much greater impact of the second performance, which she witnessed from the main audience location facing the performer.

\textsuperscript{905} On two occasions since the research performances, I have had conversations with audience members in different settings and they have used my gestures from the performance when speaking about similar ideas, allowing us to connect a separate conversation to our shared experience of performance.
words as in some ways my own prayers. Particularly with the opening verses of Psalm 130, during the performances I found myself caught up in feeling my own need for answers to prayer. The particle of mirativity, הָלַךְ “Look!” – preparing the audience for the unexpected information to follow\textsuperscript{906} – was spoken directly to the audience and given a tone of excited anticipation, drawing on my own sense of anticipation of the audience’s response to the performance.

I attempted to convey more subtle emotions at times by varying the pace of the words spoken. For example, in Ps 120:7, a pause on the word “they” conveys a sense of disrespect, even before the description “are for war” is spoken. In Psalm 123, a pause after the image of eyes looking to YHWH before the word “until” changes the emphasis from a description of how long the action will be done to a current plea for intervention, which is then spelled out in the next clause.

Many of the images within the collection are novel or unique similes rather than the more common metaphors found throughout the Psalter. The individuality and freshness of these similes was conveyed by pausing after the word “like” to intimate the word picture being drawn or thought of contemporaneously with being spoken. Several audience members commented on the freshness of these images, with one or two consciously observing the effect of these pauses.

I had translated וָיוָיו as “life” throughout the collection so as to avoid contemporary connotations evoked by the word “soul” that are foreign to the text. This presented a challenge when the word יָיו, “life,” is used in Ps 133:3. The distinction was conveyed by changing my tone of voice: life (וָיו) was spoken conversationally and accompanied by a simple gesture toward my heart, whereas life (יו) was pronounced emphatically and exuberantly with both hands open toward the audience.

\textsuperscript{906} See comments on Ps 121:4 in section 3.4.2 above.
I also varied both my tone and pitch to present different voices speaking within the psalms. Most perceptibly in Psalm 132, the words of David were spoken at a lower pitch and with a tone of determination, to express the content of his vow in verses 3–5. The responses of the “we” group in verses 6–7 were spoken at a higher pitch and with a tone of excitement, accompanied by a turning of the body in the opposite direction to give the sense of two voices in conversation. The words of YHWH in verses 11–12 and 14–18 were again spoken at a lower pitch – with a possibly unsuccessful attempt to differentiate this from the pitch I had used for David’s words – and with a tone of authority. Many audience members commented on their ability to hear the different voices presented within the text.

The volume of my voice was also modulated to convey shifts in who was being addressed. For example, in Psalm 130, I spoke the words addressed to YHWH more quietly, with increased volume accompanying the turn to address the audience in verse 5. I raised my voice further for verse 7, when the audience is addressed with an imperative to do likewise. In Ps 124:1 and 129:1, the same phrase is repeated after Israel has been exhorted to participate in what is being said. After the invitation, “Let Israel please say,” I repeated each phrase at greater volume, hoping to give a sense of affirmation that I was now speaking on behalf of the whole community. Psalm 131, in contrast, was spoken more quietly as a whole, affirming its self-reflective nature as a humble prayer.

Practicing and then performing tone and pitch became an important part of developing my interpretation of the text. Variation in tone can change meaning. Making choices about this was a significant reminder that I was participating in a live interpretive event, rather than attempting to convey a closed or final meaning of the text.
4.3.4 The influence of the performer’s socio-theological location

Any interpretive approach is influenced by the bias or perspective of the interpreter. This becomes readily apparent in performance, when the interpretation is embodied in a particular individual. The experience of embodying the text means that the interpretation presented is particularly shaped by the unique socio-theological location of the performer, even as they seek to allow the text to shape them. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge my own location. The interpretation was embodied in me as an Australian, female, Baptist pastor. Each of these characteristics influences my interpretation and my experience.

Australian culture is known for being comparatively informal or casual, typified in the idea of being “laid-back.” This no doubt influenced the decisions I made in performing the text. For example, I deliberately chose to keep both staging and gesture simple (see section 4.3.1 above) but this choice was likely subconsciously influenced by my cultural location as well. Similarly, the decision to speak rather than chant the text in Hebrew was influenced by the perception that this could be viewed by a contemporary Australian audience as too unusual or even ostentatious, as well as consideration for the high degree of unfamiliarity with the Hebrew language in this cultural context. I had a certain degree of nervousness that the performances as a whole would be seen as “pretentious” in this cultural setting, as many Australians are not regular theatre-goers or performance attenders and can even tend to take pride in preferring more “down-to-earth” pursuits. I was therefore pleasantly surprised by the overwhelming positive response from audiences and their willingness to engage with an experience outside their normal cultural setting. This might reflect another dimension of

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wider Australian culture, willingness to have a go, but could also be particular to members of the community of faith, who have a pre-existing desire to connect with God through Scripture that leads to openness to experiences that might facilitate this connection.

Women in Australian culture generally enjoy a broader acceptance of being emotionally expressive than men, which allowed me scope to show distress visibly that might not have been viewed in the same way had the texts been performed by a man. The imagery in Psalm 131 of a weaned child upon “me” was also able to be expressed more naturally, even though I am not in fact a mother. Speaking in the voices of King David and YHWH in Psalm 132 presented more of a challenge, as culturally it is unusual to hear male speech spoken by a female voice. I attempted to deepen my voice and give “authority” to my tone, something of which I am conscious after numerous discussions over many years about women’s voices preaching in my cultural context. Some of the war imagery in the text might have been less pronounced in my expression than if a male had embodied the text. The fact that these texts are poetry might also have allowed the audience to connect them more closely with a female performer, as poetry is often presumed to be more “emotional” than prose. Cultural assumptions might have differed if it had been a type of text perceived to be more authoritative or didactic.

My particular denominational context is that of the Australian Baptist churches and three of the four performances took place broadly within this context. In this church context, as in other Protestant traditions, a high value is placed on Scripture and

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909 James M. Henslin et. al, Sociology: A Down To Earth Approach (Frenchs Forest: Pearson Australia, 2014), 60.
910 There were a handful of other attenders at some of these performances and the final performance venue (M) consisted of theological students from a much broader range of Protestant contexts.
there is an oft-expressed desire to centre communal life around the Bible. At the same time, in my own church experience there has not often been imaginative or experiential engagement with the biblical text. As a member of a non-liturgical church tradition, a portion of Scripture is sometimes read during a church gathering but this is rarely done in a responsive or communal way. Private, individual reading and study of Scripture is greatly encouraged, although research would suggest that the majority of church attenders struggle to practice this kind of engagement with the text consistently.

Furthermore, my church tradition is certainly influenced by print culture assumptions about what the biblical text is and therefore how it can and should be engaged with (see section 2.4.2.1 above). It also became apparent from audience responses that the questions asked in the survey had been influenced by my own assumptions and experience as a member of this community of faith. In particular, questions were asked that contrasted performance with silent, individual reading. Those who came from more liturgical church contexts noted their familiarity with hearing and reading psalms aloud as members of a congregation – something I am much less habituated to – and were able to add another dimension to the comparison from their experience in a slightly different church context, noting how experiencing the performance differed from participating in antiphonal reading. For example:

R5: As an Anglican, psalms are a regular part of daily prayer ... [and] psalms are said corporately and/or responsively and sometimes even sung/chanted. Comparing this experience of responsive saying/reading of psalms I found it easier to get a sense of meaning and mood by hearing/seeing them performed than when reading in church.

912 See Adrian Blenkinsop, The Bible According to Gen Z (Minto: Bible Society Australia, 2013); Ruth Powell et al, Enriching Church Life: A Guide to Results from National Church Life Surveys for Local Churches (Second edition; St Marys: Mirrabooka, 2012).
913 See section 4.4.1 below for an explanation of how survey respondents are referred to in this thesis.
Finally, although as a researcher I am interested in the qualitative data obtained from the performances, it is difficult to separate this from my interests as a pastor, particularly given that numbers of audience members were also members of my own wider community of faith. As a pastor, therefore, I am also interested in how the experience shapes participants’ spiritual lives. This was helpful in understanding how audience members might hear the text and therefore adapting the translation for their benefit. It also allowed me in performances to connect with individual members of the audience whose background or circumstances I knew and to imagine speaking the words of the text directly into their situation, thereby testing the applicability of my interpretation. It is possible, however, that this pastoral perspective limited the interpretive possibilities available to me. As a methodology directed toward the goal of theological interpretation, the performances were grounded in the community of faith and in some sense bridged the “gap” between academia and church. Reflecting on the performances and talking with members of my community who participated has also exercised my imagination in terms of the possibilities that performance presents for both worship and didactic purposes within a church context.  

4.3.5 Reflections on performance as a methodology

The experience of performing a text enables the interpreter to reflect critically on the benefits and limitations of performance as a methodology of biblical interpretation. Performance of the text moves the interpretation beyond its intellectual dimension, adding emotional and imaginative dimensions to the experience of biblical

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914 Due to their experiences of attending the performances, some leaders in my community of faith gave me an opportunity to engage a large gathering of members from our wider movement in an “experiment” to learn a psalm together by hearing and bodily expressing it, which received extremely positive feedback.
interpretation, which are not often spoken about in contemporary discussions of textual “meaning.”

Performing the text has changed the way I think and speak about the text, shifting it from a static object located on a page to a dynamic event in which I can participate. This changes the perception of how each psalm, and even the collection as a whole, works. For example, when referring to a text on a page, I would speak of the words “in Psalm 120,” whereas when referring to my performance, my phrasing changed to the words “during Psalm 120.” A written text can be studied in disjointed pieces; when performed it progressively unfolds in order, there is no going back. This unfolding heightens the role of later reverberations of ideas and imagery from earlier in the collection and leads them to have a cumulative impact. Specific details of the text can at times be lost or overlooked, but instead their overall compounding impact is keenly felt. Connections between different parts of the text were discovered by intuitive experience rather than by comparative study. Echoes of earlier parts of the text that I had not noticed in translating and learning the text were “heard” for the first time as I voiced them during performances. For example, the use of “righteous” as a descriptor for the community in Psalm 124 and for YHWH in Psalm 129 and the plea to seek the “good” of Jerusalem in Psalm 122 and the declaration of the experience of “good” as the gathered community in Psalm 133.

West speaks of a performance interpreter being able to hold the entire text in mind simultaneously.\(^{915}\) This has also been my experience. I now know the collection not only as individual psalms, but as a whole. This is different from reading it beginning to end. There is a sense of being able to hold emotions, impressions, and even ideas from the text together at the same time and to allow them to interact in all directions.

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\(^{915}\) West, “Putting On The Word,” 2.
with one another. I feel I have taken one step out of my usual “linear” framework of understanding.

Audience members commented on what they experienced as my “obvious” passion for the texts performed. From follow up conversations, it appears that they perceived that the texts were chosen for performance due to a pre-existing passion for these particular texts. As the performer, the experience was somewhat different. These texts were chosen for a number of reasons, but the passion I expressed in and for them is something that developed and grew out of the experiencing of learning and performing them. Performing the text had a transformative impact on the relationship between interpreter and text.

The significance of “place” in these texts was noted by many audience members and certainly commentators have often noted the spatial dimensions of the Psalms of Ascents. As the performer, there was a sense of being transported during performance. The geographical references coupled with physical movement created an existential experience of location other than in the performance space; at times it felt like I was in ancient Jerusalem, or wandering the desert, as my body and emotions “took over.” This was due to the familiarity with the text necessary for performance. My mind was no longer engaged in reading, reciting, or even remembering the text, but was able to imagine itself inside the text in some way. Rhoads speaks of this as experiencing the point of view of the speaker in performance.

Performing three of the psalms in Hebrew was a different experience again. The oft-stated insight that communication is up to 93% non-verbal was borne out in my experience as the power and effect of the text had to be communicated primarily

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916 For example, by Prinsloo, “The Role of Space”; Gillmayr-Bucher, “Like Olive-shoots around Your Table.”
917 Rhoads, “Performance Criticism—Part 1,” 120.
918 Traceable to Albert Mehrabian, NonVerbal Communication (Chicago: Aldine Transaction, 1972), who argues that communication is 7% verbal, 38% tone and 55% body language.
through movement, gesture, and tone. The point of view I experienced shifted further, from that of one communicating the words of the text to that of one sharing the felt experience of the text.

4.3.6 Performer-researcher reflections on the text performed

The experience of performance enables the interpreter to enter the world of the particular text chosen, gaining an immediate experience of it by imagining and hearing it rather than seeing it as words on a page. Performance can thereby become exegetical and theological research into the text.

To be able to perform the text it must first be known thoroughly and comprehensively. Performing it provides further knowledge of a different kind. As the text is experienced, its perspective is embraced and owned by the performer. Feedback from audience members suggests that witnessing the performance provided overall imaginative and emotional connections with the Psalms of Ascents, rather than deeper theological understanding of their contents. The experience of performing them was again richer. Certainly the imaginative and emotive dimensions were highlighted, but the theological content of these psalms was also experienced in new ways, opening up further possibilities for exploring the text’s key theological ideas as well as discerning the divine discourse within the text. Performance confirmed insights from the close reading of the text that these psalms provide an exploration through the lens of pilgrimage of the experience of humanity, the world, and God. Performance also allowed me to experience the worldmaking dynamic: learning and enacting these psalms has reframed the way they influence not only my thinking but also my engagement with the world. These insights are integrated and explored in Chapters 5–8.

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919 Rhoads, “Performance Criticism—Part 1,” 120.
bringing them together with the exploration of the collection’s anthropo-logic, cosmo-
logic, and theo-logic.

4.4 Receiving audience feedback

4.4.1 Performance and audience details

I undertook four separate performances for research purposes in September–October 2015. After each performance, audience members were invited to discuss the experience with one another in a small group, before filling in a survey response form (see Appendix 1). As well as brief demographical information, a set of questions was asked about the experience of the performance and another set about the understanding of the text itself.

The first performance took place on a Thursday evening at a Baptist church (R) in South Australia with eleven audience members including members of my church, members of other Baptist churches nearby, and two people from other denominations who were friends of those attending. The second performance took place on a Tuesday afternoon at the multi-denominational theological college (T) at which I work, in South Australia, with fifteen audience members comprising students and staff at the college as well as three friends of students. The third performance took place at a Baptist church (C) in the Australian Capital Territory on a Sunday morning during the regular worship service. Of those who attended church that morning, twenty-four people chose to participate in the post-performance discussion and survey. The final performance took place on a Wednesday afternoon at an Anglican theological college (M) in the Australian Capital Territory, with ten audience members, all students and staff of the college.
Audience members are designated in this study with the letter corresponding to the venue at which they attended a performance, along with a randomly assigned number, for example R1, T2, and so on. The discussion and survey questions used after these performances can be found in Appendix 1. Audience members’ full responses to the survey are found in digital form in Appendix 2, transcribed from their handwritten surveys accurately, including any spelling, punctuation, or grammatical errors. An en dash indicates questions that were unanswered. Quotes from the surveys used in this thesis are faithful to these originals with some small exceptions for clarity: ellipses are used to indicate the omission of words from the original; square brackets are used to indicate words added for clarity; symbols including ampersands have been changed to words; and italics are used for all forms of emphasis in the original, such as underlining and all upper case lettering.

From the four different performances, sixty response forms were received. Among the respondents there was a roughly even gender split, with thirty (50%) female and twenty-five (42%) male. Five people chose not to identify their gender on the response form. The age of respondents skewed toward older people. The large majority, fifty-seven (95%), said they had been a Christian for more than twenty years.

At three of the venues, T, R, and M, respondents voluntarily chose to attend the performance, meaning they were interested and therefore likely to be engaged. At the fourth venue, C, respondents chose to attend church rather than the performance specifically, however, they then chose to participate in the post-performance discussions and surveys. This self-selection likely explains why respondents tended to be highly involved in church life and ministry, more than might be expected of a random sample. Eight people (13%) are in paid ministry and another twenty-two (36%) in voluntary ministry. Twenty-seven (45%) participate in small group Bible studies.
Respondents are also highly familiar with the Scriptures, with nineteen (32%) saying they are “very” familiar with the Bible and another thirty-three (55%) “quite” familiar. Only five (8%) said they are “somewhat” familiar with the Bible, three (5%) “a little bit,” and none “not at all” familiar. There was a marked trend of lower levels of engagement with the Psalms in particular than with the Bible as a whole, with forty respondents (66%) rating their familiarity with the Psalms lower on the scale than their familiarity with the Bible as a whole and only one person rating their familiarity with the Psalms higher. Three respondents (5%) said they are “very” familiar with the Psalms, twenty-six (43%) “quite” familiar, twenty-three (38%) “somewhat,” six (10%) “a little bit,” and two (3%) “not at all.”

4.4.2 Audience responses

Significantly, the majority of respondents answered questions about the performance in much more detail than they did questions about the text. Twenty-one respondents (35%) noted their uncertainty or difficulty in articulating how the performance shaped their understanding of the text itself and twelve (20%) left one or more of these questions unanswered. These responses suggest that being in an audience of a performance is not necessarily the best way to understand a text cognitively. Responses to questions about theological interpretation of the collection were often brief, for example, “God is faithful,” or “He cares,” suggesting to me that the performance left respondents with an overall impression rather than specific insights and/or confirmed their existing theological understanding rather than bringing new insights.

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920 See Thomas E. Boomershine, *The Messiah of Peace: A Performance-Criticism Commentary on Mark’s Passion-Resurrection Narrative* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2015), 10, who proposes that in performance the meaning of a story is “only minimally connected with facts or ideas.”
Responses to questions about the performance itself were much more detailed and descriptive, indicating that respondents found the performance of the texts emotionally engaging, imaginatively interesting, and practically useful. My initial analysis of the responses sought to discover the most frequent words and phrases used by audience members in relation to their experience in order to evaluate how the interpretation was seen, heard, and felt by the audience. By far the most frequent comments were about emotions, with 57% of respondents noting that the emotions they saw or felt were what would primarily stay with them from the performance. Many commented on the range of different emotions expressed in these psalms – from joy to despair – as well as the ability of the performance to engage with them emotionally. These responses suggest that performance of the text is affective, allowing the text to be not simply heard or even understood, but felt. Audience members’ responses on this include:

C6: [The performer’s] depth of knowledge brought an intimacy to the emotive experience.

C16: The emotion of the performance was palpable ... the expression of them with emotion and from the personal point of view made me feel their heartfelt content rather than just hearing the content.

M2: I wanted to cry at times. In fact, I seemed to be carried along with the emotions of the performer. I was able to relate to what emotion seemed to lie behind the text.

R8: I was able to savour something of the pathos and feeling of this at a more visceral or ‘gut’ level than otherwise.

R9: I usually read the words and look for meaning ... but I seldom reach the depths of emotion that I did in the performance ... I was caught up in the tears and joy.

There were also two respondents (C3; C5) who clearly stated that they felt nothing from the performance. The balance of responses overall seems to differ somewhat from Boomershine’s experience of highly literate audiences who are “thinking so hard that they can’t feel anything,” The Messiah of Peace, 11. The distinction could be due to these texts being poetry.
T6: I experienced more emotions by hearing than by reading. When I read I tend to analyse [sic] the text, when I hear I feel.

The wide range of emotions I expressed throughout the performance did leave some audience members feeling like it had been a rollercoaster ride. This confirms that I was able to provide respondents with an overall impression of the psalms’ emotional range and depth, a feature that has often been noted by those who have studied them.922 Comments that illustrate this include:

R7: The range of emotions from grief to joy.

T5: ... the range of emotions I felt was much greater than reading.

C6: ... the range/gamut of emotions God gave us – our capacity for depths and heights and the gift that is.

T1: Such a range, which drifted from psalm to psalm, that I found it difficult to hold any particular emotion.

The second most frequent audience response related to the engagement of the imagination during the performance. Forty-three percent of respondents specifically noted how the performance enabled them to “see” or imagine aspects of the text in new ways. My findings here resonate with Rhoads’ suggestion that performance has the potential to elicit the text’s capacity to provoke vivid imagination.923 Representative comments include:

R10: Movement across stage helped me to visualise the pilgrimage, going up the mountain ...

R7: It allowed me to be more imaginative than just reading it. ... I felt the dust as we walked up the hill to the temple ... I could picture myself as part of Israel, suffering and rejoicing with them.

T3: I felt like I could see Zion!


T8: I saw the pilgrimage in this performance. I saw the passion, heartfelt longing, the pleas and the delight that the psalmist was expressing.

R2: Brings it to life somehow – one can imagine it being read back in O.T. Temple times.

R8: I seemed to get more out of the text this way and my imagination was more fully engaged. The person sitting next to me is an artist and she said she could “see” the mountains and had a sense of the community living and breathing.

T10: When I read, I only have mental pictures, but when I heard and watched, other pictures came into my mind. Pictures of, in one instance, family; in another, a temple; and another; mountains, people walking ...

One audience member observed that this imaginative visualisation of the text can be experienced outside performance, although it might not often be:

C11: When I read it myself, I read it like this, making the words live in my mind. But that’s me, a bit odd.

The overall audience feedback indicated that this was an unusual response and therefore that performance has the potential to provide many people with a different way of engaging with Scripture.

Reflecting on the performance afterwards, 75% of audience members explicitly commented that they had experienced the text in a different way. These responses capture the difficult-to-quantify “freshness” that a number of performance critics describe. For example:

T11: A different dimension was activated – more food here for the imagination.

T9: It’s kind of like seeing/hearing the text in colour rather than black and white.

T7: I was transported.

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924 See Ward and Troibisch, ix.
R3: I connected with [the] text and could visually imagine/illustrate and therefore understand a lot more. I found it way more enjoyable and am left wanting more.

As with the rush of emotions, a few audience members noted the way the performance continued to move forward, meaning that the imagination too can almost feel overwhelmed. This echoed my own experience as the performer that the impact of the collection in this way is cumulative. One audience member pleads:

R1: Performance involved a constant rush of verbal images – Stop – let me take that in!

Another common theme in audience responses was the physicality of the performance, connecting the texts to real space as well as imagined place. The text was embodied in some way for the audience,925 as it was embodied by me. For example:

T2: The physicality and externalisation of the text ... brought an increased sense of dynamism for me ... [a] sense of place ... place matters.

T13: I also heard the value/importance of place in the text i.e. Zion. I began to think on the importance of sacred places in my faith.

T1: Psalms belong in a 3D world rather than on a 2D page ... Performed text moved it off the page into a concrete situation.

This embodied enactment of the texts offered audience members an invitation to engage in and with the texts in some way for themselves, hinting at the power of performance to facilitate a transformative encounter with the text. For example:

R8: ... just holding things in our heads in formative fashion, is not as real and solid as acting it out through the body. Saying it isn’t as real and satisfying as doing it.

M6: Since I have no control over the pace, or no control over the phrases I skip over, I was invited to attend in an entirely new way.

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925 As an addendum, the performance experience of “space” continued for at least one research participant, who in coming across an image of the Bünting Clover Leaf Map (1581) – which places Jerusalem in the centre of the world – weeks later, immediately sent an email to share the connections it evoked with the performance.
C1: I felt drawn into the texts, as if I were not just a listener but also a participant in what was happening.

C2: It becomes a lived experience that is far more emotive. It inspires the participants to respond similarly, with similar reverence and gratitude.

Several audience members were merely impressed by the “feat” of memory, but others were able to recognise that I had not only memorised but also internalised the text:

C10: ... learning and performing the scripture is enacting discipleship. You really must love these words and know them in your being.

C7: The passion and love exhibited through the time and energy taken to learn them by heart and interpret them through the delivery.

R7: [The performer] lived these texts – they belong to her and are part of who she is.

Many respondents noted the ability of gesture and tone to convey subtext. They found that my use of consistent gestures made various aspects of the text more meaningful and memorable to them:

M5: The power of simple gesture to help interpret text ...

M2: Things that I’m sure I would have puzzled over if I’d read them were made plain through gesture.

C4: Common themes that persisted throughout the text, which were linked with consistent hand gestures.

C14: Her consistent body gestures emphasised the repetition of certain themes through those psalms [and] ... made the text clearer and more powerful.

T9: The importance of the non-verbal dimension of communication. How much is conveyed via tone, gestures and movement in addition to the words themselves.

M2: I’m more inclined towards observing visual patterns rather than aural, so I can’t actually recall a great deal of the content that was
spoken. The gestures and expressions, on the other hand, are still fresh in my mind.

Some audience members did feel that the gestures used could have been more expressive or expansive, possibly reflecting differences in culture or personality between myself as the performer and particular audience members:

M10: Gestures were helpful but restrained.

M1: Combination of tone and gesture conveyed interpretation of psalm [but] some gestures could be more demonstrative.926

The overwhelming majority of respondents (93%) felt that the use of tone brought emotions and even the text itself to life, suggesting that I was able to convey the subtext of my interpretation through the performance:

R3: I enjoyed the different tones used in the performance it helped me both connect and identify with the context.

T8: We miss tone when we read in silence and perhaps also when the psalms are read publicly. The tone added life to the text.

C10: Tone conveys emotion and also reinforced meaning and gave meaning.

R10: I had a stronger reaction/feeling, due to the tone ... when reading it for myself I don’t know that I would have read the expression the same way as it was performed.

T3: Tone, emotion, being invited by experience into their interaction with the text and God is very powerful.

Thirteen respondents (21%) observed the communal nature of the audience experience, noting their awareness of the community they were experiencing the performance with, as well as the communal nature of the texts themselves. The performance enabled them to experience a communal interpretation that appears to be

926 One audience member also suggested the addition of props and lighting, suggesting a preference for a more theatrical experience. C13: “... improvement with props and lighting etc will enhance the quality of the performance.”
unusual in an individualistic culture. This echoed my own experience of performance as
in some ways a communal interpretation; even though the audience did not help make
interpretive choices, they were very much in my mind as I did so. Representative
comments include:

C1: Reading the text for myself, I’m alone. Hearing the text
performed made me aware of being part of a community.

T2: *Community!* We heard it together (cf. reading it alone).

T13: The corporate nature of the psalms – too often I read the psalms
from an individualistic perspective.

R 11: They are a community document not an individual one.

Some audience members were able to articulate the experience of collective
emotion, which is unusual in our culture.

T12: Group feeling of emotions ... in a live performance.

C7: Our emotions and feelings are shared. We do feel as others do.
We can feel what affects others.

C11: The texts apply a lot of things in life which are hard to put into
words communally – I don’t talk about futility in community as a
natural bonding experience. But the Psalms can! ... in the world except
when our footy team wins, we rarely see group emotions in play.

In terms of the texts themselves, 24 responses (40%) used the words
“conversational” or “dialogical” or synonyms, indicating that the performance
particularly accentuated this aspect of the Pilgrim Psalter. The shifting voices I used
throughout the psalms were heard in the performance translation and the impact of this
appeared to be to draw audience members in as though they were participants in a
dialogue:

R8: I also ‘heard’ the different voices of the supplicant, God, narrator,
accuser etc.

C7: I felt we were in conversation.
M7: [The performance] elucidated the dialogical nature of these psalms.

C2: It felt like a personal conversation.

A further nine respondents spoke of the text’s “immediacy,” indicating that the performance connected the psalms to them personally in a more direct way than reading the text, again underlining the ability of this method of interpretation to transform:

M4: A sense of immediacy, of the performer’s strong connexion to the text, which I felt came through to me personally.

C12: Being addressed directly through the words of the Psalms [is] a stark contrast with texts read from the lectern.

T4: It lifted from the page – brought an immediacy – got me thinking about how doing this shapes community and forms disciples.

Several respondents noted that although their emotions and imaginations were engaged, the performance did not help them feel they “understood” the text more. This suggests that unlike my experience of performance functioning as a method of theological exegesis, for many audience members performance was primarily, or even solely, about emotional and imaginative engagement.927

M3: I don’t learn as well by listening as by reading and found it difficult to remember much of what I heard.

R1: It didn’t allow me to dwell on the message; as I was still thinking/experiencing what the psalmist was saying when another image/thought/idea was presented.

C11: As I read the [biblical] text during the recitation, the movement was distracting, and I didn’t understand it.928

C13: [When] reading the text we can go back to reread it and understand ...

927 Some responses appeared to reflect the Protestant community of faith’s emphasis on intellectual understanding of texts as the primary goal and suggested that engaging with Scripture via emotion or imagination is a foreign experience for many.

928 See Boomershine, *The Messiah of Peace*, 10–11, who describes his experience with “high-literate” audience members who sometimes “militantly look at the text ... in order to see if the story is being told ‘right.’”
C22: [Understanding the text] would require detailed study – more than is possible from a direct read-aloud presentation.

Other respondents were able to articulate a distinction between understanding and experience. They therefore began to consider the benefits of this different way of engaging with the text.\(^929\)

C15: Greater understanding [and] ... greater enjoyment. ‘Coloured’ the words ... Expanded them.

C20: Reading aloud gives me more time to take in the meaning ... performance added one more dimension ... orally and also visually.

T14: I’m not sure how much ‘new’ stuff, new understanding I gained in terms of ‘head knowledge’ off a first performance ... but hearing them this way makes me want to hear them again.

T4: “Understand” – maybe not ... It added/reinforced my understanding. But it helped me experience them, participate in them. It was very helpful in moving beyond comprehension.

The repeated use of the title “A song of the pilgrimage” to frame the collection clearly had an impact on the way the audience heard and interpreted the performance. Although a specific question was asked about pilgrimage in relation to the text, twelve respondents also used the idea of pilgrimage to talk about their experience of the performance itself. This suggests that performance highlighted the superscription and allowed it to function as a hermeneutical lens – through which the texts were interpreted and responded to – for the audience:

R9: The pilgrimage aspect was evident in moving from lament and defeat to praise at Yahweh’s dwelling in Jerusalem.

T13: The psalms were pilgrimage and I heard so many varying emotions in the psalms, pain, faith, joy, disappointment, desperation, hope. This made me feel relieved that God is there through all the emotions I do or could experience in my pilgrimage.

\(^929\) One audience member later shared that they returned home and read the text after the performance, something they would not have done otherwise, demonstrating that the performance elicited a desire and willingness to engage further with the Scripture.
R4: Listening and writing this and the discussion has been a positive pilgrimage tonight – thank you.

There were no questions about the performance in Hebrew in the survey forms, but 23 respondents (38%) noted the impact of the Hebrew as something that stood out or would stay with them from the performance. This surprised me, but correlates with the experience of other biblical performance critics, who have noted positive receptions of texts performed in the original language, even when it is not understood. Some respondents expressed a general sense of appreciation for the sounds of the unfamiliar language despite its unfamiliarity:

T13: The beauty of Hebrew language.

T15: Hebrew language sounded so beautiful.

C8: The Hebrew – I thought that was lovely.

T8: The reading in Hebrew – it’s such a beautiful language and we hear it read/recited so rarely.

Others observed a sense of poetry that they felt they could hear in it, noting particular features such as rhythm and assonance that seem to be easier to spot when the words themselves are not understood. One comment about parallelism was unexpected and it is difficult to know whether this was projected by the audience member’s own assumptions or expectations, as this feature is not particularly evident in these texts. It could be, however, that this was a reference more to the direct repetition that is a feature of the collection. For example:

R7: I loved hearing the Hebrew and could feel the poetry in this unfamiliar language.

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930 Ethics approval for the questions to be asked had been received prior to the decision to include Hebrew in the performances, meaning questions specifically on the impact of the Hebrew language in performance could not be added.


932 A number of audience members were theologically educated and so would be familiar with parallelism as a key feature of Hebrew poetry.
M3: Hearing the psalms recited in Hebrew for the first time and recognising some words in the assonance of what was spoken.

R9: The poetical expression in the text especially the parallelism of Hebrew poetry.

C6: The beauty and rhythm of the Hebrew – that we lose so much in translation.

A few respondents found not understanding the language enabled them to feel the emotions of the gestures and tone more forcefully, allowing them to enter into the affective experience of performance more completely. This reiterated to me the powerful impact of non-verbal communication:

R10: The Hebrew – even though I didn’t understand it the tone and emotion behind it was powerful.

R9: The expressions of emotion that were evident in the Hebrew which I did not understand ...

R5: Expression, movement, pace and tone certainly helped convey the meaning of the text – especially when they were performed in Hebrew.

Unfortunately, the type of microphone available for use at venue C led to three respondents, all older people, being unable to hear all the words of the performance. Despite this disadvantage, two felt they were still able to get a ‘sense’ of the performance from what they saw, again affirming how much can be conveyed without words:

C21: Most of the spoken words were inaudible [to me]. However, the speaker did convey a sense of intimacy with God and a reverence for Him.

C19: I needed to concentrate too much to hear some words ... [but] the movement drew attention to the scenes.

933 The third thought the performance was too long. C22: “I think the technique has some value, but within limits. It may be useful, for one or two of the psalms but not 15!”
Some audience members articulated their awareness that what they experienced was an interpretation of the collection:

T13: Hearing others share the psalms put a different emphasis on them than I would read.

C15: ... let me see another person’s interpretation

C18: One is exposed to another’s ‘take’ on what is written.

Finally, several respondents provided unprompted reflections on the possibilities performance might present for the community of faith engaging with texts in the future. This highlighted the limitations of this research with one performer and an audience, rather than a community enacting the texts as a whole, and the possibility that future research engaging members of the community themselves in the performance of Scripture could be a fruitful avenue for interpretation:

C7: I found myself wanting to hear more voices presenting them in this way.

M5: [There is] a great need for good Bible readers/actors in churches.

R8: I wonder how the church can be more creative with reading the Psalms, and take more risks.

T4: I was drawn in, wanted to join in and learn them too ... I wonder if there’s a further step ... from reading to hearing to learning them together to sing aloud/perform together?

A key conclusion that can be drawn from the audience responses is that the performances engaged people affectively and imaginatively even more so than intellectually. This appears to be particularly appropriate for the Psalms, given their poetic character, and for the contemporary community of faith’s context, where primacy is often given to intellectual understanding. It is also apparent that the experience of performer and audience member is significantly different. From the audience feedback I learned a great deal about the emotional and affective dimensions of the text, whereas
from my own experience as the performer, I also gained crucial insights into the theological impact of the text as a whole. This difference in experience between performer and audience suggests that further research could be pursued as to how engaging in performance of texts as a community might enable all members to experience both the affective and educative dimensions of performance.

4.5 Conclusions

Utilising performance as a method of research allowed me to enter into the world of the text and experience it in a new way, allowing me to explore its meaning and impact. Translating for performance involved careful consideration of both the verbal and non-verbal communication of the text. I had to pay careful attention to the changing directions of discourse to discern who I would be speaking as and to at various points. This enabled me to connect with the text’s emotive and imaginative dimensions. Internalisation of the text enabled me to experience it as a whole as well as its unfolding parts in real time. Learning the text for performance also functioned as a test of my translation, leading to revisions that attempted to elicit its meaning and impact for my community, including experiencing the power of its imagery and the emotion of its discourse.

Physically embodying the text helped me consider its spatial dimensions and how it connects to real time and place. The use of gesture, tone, and pace aided my understanding of its emphases, both those that are affirmed by repetition and those providing a level of surprise due to their unexpectedness.

Using performance as research meant that the influence of my socio-theological and cultural location was apparent and could not be hidden or overlooked. I was conscious that I was presenting an interpretation, rather than the sole interpretation, of
the text. This was clear to audience members as well, which may not be the case with other methods of presenting the text’s meaning or import.

Performing the text for myself has emphasised the orality of Scripture and how different it is to relate to the text as internalised meaning and impact rather than as words on the page. It has also given me a greater understanding of the collection itself, understanding its temporal and spatial unfolding, feeling the power of its imagery, experiencing its point of view from within, and holding together its intra-textual connections.

Each of my performances functioned as a unique embodied interpretation of the text. Each performance also enabled me to test this interpretation in community and obtain feedback on how it was received. I was no longer alone in my work on the text. My performances sought to persuade audience members to feel the emotions of the collection and enter into its way of seeing the world. The responses received suggest that this happened for many people.

The audience research done for this study confirms anecdotal evidence that audiences find performances of biblical texts more emotionally affective, imaginatively engaging, and memorable than reading them. Making use of the title of the Psalms of Ascents as a framing device in performance provided the audience with a hermeneutical lens through which the text was understood. It seems clear that the performances provided audiences of contemporary Australian Christians with a fresh and engaging experience of Scripture. Further provisional conclusions from the initial audience research undertaken are that participating in an embodied interpretation of the text enabled people to consider its spatial dimensions and that repetition was made more evident and memorable by gesture rather than words alone, as was emotion by tone. The experience of being an audience provided an opportunity for some level of communal engagement.

See Dewey, 152–53.
interpretation. Finally, my research suggests that there is scope for fruitful study by involving the community in the act of performance of biblical texts.

Performance underscores the worldmaking impact of the text as it is embodied and enacted. Using performance as research emphasised what texts can do, rather than just what they say, aligning well with the goals of canonical-theological interpretation. The theological interpretation of the Psalms of Ascents in Part C of this thesis draws from the audience research and my own experience as performer to consider key effects of the text that were highlighted by using performance as a research methodology and might otherwise be overlooked: in particular its affective, kinaesthetic (spatial + movement), and relational dimensions. These are explained in Chapter 5 and their impact on theological interpretation of the Pilgrim Psalter is explored throughout Chapters 6–8.
PART C: INTERPRETATION

Chapter 5: Preparations for pilgrimage

5.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out perspectives that outline the approach taken to the Pilgrim Psalter and thereby functions as preparation for the theological interpretation that follows in Chapters 6–8. It integrates the methodological approaches taken in the thesis (Chapter 2) with the close reading of the text (Chapter 3) and the performance of the resulting translation (Chapter 4). It also introduces the dialogical interplay of text and performance that will be used throughout the theological interpretation of Psalms 120–134.

The application of the three methodologies outlined in Chapter 2 to the text provides a map for its interpretation. The canonical approach identifies the superscription to these psalms as a hermeneutical lens and an interpretive frame. The theological interpretation focuses on the three key areas of humanity, the world, and God. The performance research leads to a consideration of the effect of the text on those who participate in its use, those who “enact” it.

The performance research undertaken, including analysis of audience responses, saw three key dimensions of the Pilgrim Psalter’s effect emerge. Its anthropo-logic in particular engages the emotions. Its cosmo-logic works to inspire the imagination kinaesthetically. Its theo-logic invites us into relationship with YHWH. A brief explanation of the theoretical underpinnings of each of these dimensions and how they are approached in this thesis is provided in section 5.3. The dialogical “rhythm” of text and performance is used within this section to provide a preliminary overview of how these effects are produced by the text and accentuated by performance.
5.2 Text: Methodological maps

5.2.1 Canonical Framing

Adopting a canonical approach to the text, this thesis considers the theological significance of the text’s final form, including its arrangement, its ordering, and in particular its superscriptions as a hermeneutical lens and performative frame. The motif of pilgrimage is a framework to the canonical presentation of the text and functions both to link and demarcate the psalms within the collection. It also provides a broad scaffold for Part C of this thesis, with the theological interpretation undertaken construed as a pilgrimage for the reader. The titles of Chapters 5–8 therefore guide the reader of the thesis along this journey. This chapter – Preparations for pilgrimage – provides necessary background information to prepare the reader for the undertaking. Chapter 6 – The frame and contours of pilgrimage – considers the superscription and the first three psalms, which together present an outline of the pilgrimage journey from the margins to the centre at Jerusalem. Chapter 7 – The ongoing life of pilgrimage – is the theological interpretation of the middle nine psalms of the collection, which include perspectives on both everyday and national experiences. Chapter 8 – The destination and purpose of pilgrimage – looks at the final three psalms of the collection, which function as a conclusion due to their shared focus on the concrete location of Jerusalem and the experience of community found in its role as pilgrimage endpoint. Chapter 8 concludes by looking at the collection as a whole and the ways it can be worldmaking for those who enact it.

Each individual psalm has been given a heading that articulates its contribution to the pilgrimage motif as a whole. Each of these is a participle, symbolising the fact that pilgrimage always involves movement forward. Similarly, smaller groupings of psalms are introduced with a heading that seeks to describe their cumulative effect.
Throughout Chapters 5–8, I have also included “waypoints,” brief sections that occur at the end of the interpretation of a smaller section or group of psalms within the collection. These function as a place to pause along the interpretive journey and to synthesise ideas from the analysis of the preceding psalms.

5.2.2 Theological interpretation

Chapters 6–8 of this thesis provide a theological interpretation of the Psalms of Ascents based on the methodologies explained in Chapter 2. Both theological interpretation of Scripture and biblical performance criticism emphasise the nature of the text and its effect on the community of faith. Such an interpretation seeks to discern the distinctive theological witness of the collection by focusing on what these texts mean for the community of faith, how they intend to shape readers, and how they reconstruct reality.

Adapting Brown’s categories of theological interpretation, for each psalm the three areas that are considered are its anthropo-logic, that is, the expression of the experience of being a pilgrim community, its cosmo-logic, the presentation of the world the pilgrim community inhabits, and its theo-logic, the revelation of the pilgrims’ God. Overall conclusions are then considered under the overarching term worldmaking (see section 2.2.5.4 above) to emphasise the effect the text has in reconstructing reality for enactors.

5.2.3 Performance research

The use of performance as a method of research enables the theological interpretation in Chapters 6–8 to explore in depth what was learned by internalising and performing the text. This is primarily focused on my experience as the performer who embodied and enacted the text, entering into the experiences they evoke and generate. The audience
research undertaken after the performances provides further insight into the particular dimensions of the text that were highlighted by the performance.

By enacting the text, I was able to experience its effects in a new way. For this reason, the term “enactors” is used when discussing conclusions that can be drawn from this experience about the impacts of the text. This term attempts to convey the idea that it is by entering into these texts, owning their words, considering their subtext, speaking and hearing them spoken aloud, and using the body to represent them that these affective, kinaesthetic, and relational effects can be realised. Enacting is more than reading; it involves the whole body and involves some level of internalisation of the text. Enactors are those who choose to use these texts as they were intended to be used: in a community, aloud, and embodied.

It should be noted that in using performance as research and in analysing the audience research I came to the conclusion that a deeper comprehension by the audience would be gained by including the wider community of faith in the process of enactment and embodiment of the text. Although the audience were able to appreciate different dimensions of the text from their experience as an audience, their survey responses suggest (unsurprisingly) that they were unable to enter into the text to the depth I was as the performer.

5.3 Performance: Experiential effects

5.3.1 Introduction

In the application of the categories adapted from Brown of anthropo-logic, cosmo-logic, and theo-logic, it became apparent from my own experience of performance and from the audience responses that there was a particular dimension of the text’s effect that corresponded with each of these categories. In terms of anthropo-logic, the perspective
on humanity, the primary effect of the text is affective, that is, it expressed and engendered emotions. In terms of cosmo-logic, the perspective on the world, the primary effect of the text is kinaesthetic, that is, it caused an imaginative engagement of moving through space and place. In terms of theo-logic, the perspective on God, the primary effect of the text is relational, that is, it offers the community an invitation into an encounter with the divine presence. These are now considered in turn.

5.3.2 Affective dimensions

5.3.2.1 Writing about emotions

It can be challenging to speak and write about emotions and particularly so in the context of biblical studies. Yet because the emotional experience was so significant in the performances of these texts, this challenge needs to be acknowledged and engaged with. Writing about emotions is difficult for several reasons: the nature of the topic, the lack of models of how to do so, and the perception that doing so is somehow “anti-intellectual.” Specific challenges faced include the range of understandings as to what emotions are, as well as how many different emotions can be enumerated.

Historically, there has not always been a consensus on exactly what emotions are. In Greek thinking, emotions were *pathos* – suffering – to be overcome. The Stoics sought *apatheia* – freedom from emotion – and this desire was adopted and refined by some influential early Christian thinkers. Others treated emotions as aspects of fallen sinful nature to be avoided and another group believed they needed to be controlled and moderated by reason. Post-Enlightenment, emotions were

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938 For example, Augustine, *The City of God*, NPNF¹, 2:1–511.
commonly regarded as non-rational – or even irrational – and viewed in sharp contrast to the more (so the argument goes) “sophisticated” activity of human reason.\textsuperscript{939} Twentieth century behaviourism held that emotions are purely the observable behaviours they generate.\textsuperscript{940} More recently, consensus has emerged that the perceived dichotomy between emotion and reason is unhelpful and indeed unscientific: emotions are always part of our thoughts and actions, and vice versa.\textsuperscript{941} Thus, contemporary studies of emotions recognise that they involve cognition in some way, although there are differing views on the nature of that cognition.\textsuperscript{942}

The nature of emotion continues to be studied in fields including cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, social science, neuroscience, and philosophy.\textsuperscript{943} A variety of models have been used, which consider emotions from various perspectives including biological, cultural, ecological, and social.\textsuperscript{944} From a neuroscientific perspective, emotions can be divided into three interacting but distinct processes: recognition or evaluation of stimulus, experience or the subsequent triggering or reaction/behaviour, and response, that is, the representation of the experience as a feeling.\textsuperscript{945}

A number of terms are used by various writers and disciplines – emotion, feeling, affect – without agreed definitions.\textsuperscript{946} In cognitive psychology, emotion is an intense

\textsuperscript{939} Karl Allen Kuhn, \textit{The Heart of Biblical Narrative: Rediscovering Biblical Appeal to the Emotions} (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 16.
\textsuperscript{942} Kuhn, 16–17.
\textsuperscript{943} Kuhn, 16.
\textsuperscript{944} See Kay Milton, “Emotion (or Life, the Universe, Everything),” in \textit{The Emotions: A Cultural Reader}: 61–76, 61.
\textsuperscript{946} See Perri 6 et al., “Introduction,” in \textit{Public Emotions} (ed. Perri 6 et al.; Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007): 1–33, 5. (Both my thesis supervisors assumed this was a copyediting error, so I assure the reader that 6 is the correct surname for the author cited here).
and brief response to stimuli and affect is a more general disposition, whereas in
stylistics the descriptions emotive and affective are used interchangeably. I have
adopted Clendenen’s definition that emotions are “human experiences that result from
evaluating a real or imagined situation in a certain way” and use words such as
emotive and affective interchangeably in a non-technical sense to cover the broad range
of perceptions and expressions of feelings experienced by individuals and communities.

Differentiating individual emotions is also a challenging task. Older
anthropological theories tended to view the emotional range as limited by the
fundamental nature of humankind, whereas some contemporary approaches allow an
indefinite variety of emotions to be socially constructed. Nevertheless, it has been
commonly held that there are six basic emotions: happiness, surprise, fear, anger,
disgust, and sadness. These can be experienced in varying levels of intensity, allowing
a wider emotional vocabulary to be developed. They can also overlap and be
experienced in various combinations. There are also emotions that are broadly
understood as “social,” such as guilt, embarrassment, and shame, as well as more
complicated emotions including elation, nostalgia, hope, Schadenfreude, Weltschmerz,
and sympathy. Though it is common to distinguish between positive
and negative emotions, drawing such a simplistic dichotomy fails to take account of the
complex and contradictory nature of emotions. This thesis seeks to embrace the fullest
possible range and complexity of emotional experience.

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948 Clendenen, 208.
949 See 6 et al., 14.
950 Adolphs, 182.
951 Adolphs, 184.
952 The pleasure derived from another’s misfortune.
953 World-weariness, or the emotional response to the gap between ideals and reality.
954 6 et al., 3.
955 See ibid., 4.
Probably due to the view that emotions are “sub-rational”, discussing emotions can be perceived as illegitimate or irrelevant to academic pursuits. Feminist scholars have noted the way such dichotomies have been mapped onto gender differences so that emotion is assumed to be “feminine,” subjective, chaotic, and inferior. There are therefore few models of how to write about emotions. It is also true that converting feelings into words is intrinsically difficult. Emotions are often perceived by their very nature to be subjective or even biased. Therefore, it could be claimed that this theological interpretation is particularly idiosyncratic to my own experience. I am contending, however, that my own experience of the emotions in the text is in a not insignificant way driven by how the text itself works and for that reason these emotions would also be experienced by other communities enacting these psalms. The resonances of the emotional arc I experienced through the performances found in the audience feedback received provide assurance that such extrapolations are appropriate.

5.3.2.2 Text

As with all of Scripture, the Psalms of Ascents do not teach an anthropology explicitly. What can be ascertained about this theological theme is predominantly to be found in the experience of being human that they articulate and invite enactors to experience. One key way the collection expresses this anthropo-logic is through the evocation of emotions.

The range of emotions expressed in the Psalms is often noted, with many commentators referencing Calvin’s comment that he thinks of the Psalms as “An

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957 See Widdowfield, 201.

958 See Lutz, 26.
Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul,” because “there is not an emotion of which any
one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror.” Scholarly treatments
of the Psalms, however, rarely provide any sustained analysis of the emotions generated
by the Psalms. In addition to the ideas these texts convey, what emotions do they
evoke? What is their affective impact on readers and here, in particular, on enactors? By
evoking situations that generate an emotional response, the text encourages enactors to
feel those emotions.

Very few emotions are explicitly named in the Psalms of Ascents. Joy is named
in Psalms 122, 126, and 129, the enemies of the community are said to feel anger (Ps
124) and hatred (Ps 129), and the possible “social emotions” of honour and shame are
mentioned in Psalms 127 and 128. Much more common are descriptions of
circumstances that can evoke emotional responses. In every psalm within the collection,
there are situations and images that provoke feelings, from distress (Ps 120) to security
(Ps 121), worship (Pss 122, 132, and 134) to oppression (Pss 123, 124, and 129), futile
work (Ps 127) to productivity (Ps 128), isolation (Pss 120 and 130) to community (Ps
133), despair to redemption (Ps 130).

There are also a number of expressions within the collection that generate
emotions. Obvious examples include crying out to YHWH (Pss 120 and 130) and
weeping and laughing (Pss 126). More subtle uses of language with affective
dimensions include the use of the words “please” (Pss 124 and 129), “look” (Pss 121,
123, 127, 128, 132, 133, and 134), the use of questions (Pss 120, 121, and 130), and the
visceral exclamation of woe (Ps 120).

Calvin, Commentary on the Book of Psalms Volume I, 23. See, for example, Kimberly Bracken Long,
Christian Worship: A Brief Introduction and Guide to Resources (Calvin institute of Christian Worship
Liturgical Studies; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 30–31, as representative examples of those who note
this but do not go any further.
The wide range and breadth of emotions generated by the Psalms, and by this collection, allows for exploration of the emotional range of what it means to be human. By giving voice to images, experiences, and feelings to do with daily life as well as pilgrimage, the collection draws enactors into not only thinking but also feeling in particular ways about life.

5.3.2.3 Performance

Embodying the collection in performance highlighted the emotional dimensions. During my performances, performer and audience alike found the expression of emotion in the text and the emotions generated to be significant and memorable experiences. Performing the collection provided a way to enter into the world of the text and thereby experience how it might impact on the world in front of the text, that is, what the text does. In the frame of anthropo-logic, this impact was primarily affective. Performing the text allowed me to experience the emotional journey of these psalms. The range and variety of emotions it elicited provided insight into the effect these psalms can have on the inner life and thereby the understanding of what it means to be human. The audience feedback received confirmed that experiencing the range and variety of emotions generated by the performance of the text was significant for their interpretation and understanding. For example:

R3: It was a journey – we were ‘moved’ through the text – through different ‘characters’ and emotions.

C6: We had to work and hear and feel during – not rely on someone to explain, but rather go on the emotional journey ourselves.

See Ehn and Löfgren, 103; Lutz, 22, on the connections between emotions and the body. The Old Testament itself has no anthropological dualism such as that between body and soul, or reason and emotion. See Bernd Janowski, Arguing With God: A Theological Anthropology of the Psalms (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013), 12.
T7: ... helped me experience the feelings of the Psalmist and Hebrew people.\textsuperscript{961}

Due to this confirmation, it can be proposed that this would hold true for other communities enacting these texts.\textsuperscript{962} Hence, the first strand I have chosen to present as a significant part of the theological interpretation of the collection is by tracing this journey of emotion.

5.3.3 \textit{Kinaesthetic dimensions}

5.3.3.1 \textit{The interplay between imagination and space}

The effect of both text and performance includes the evocation of imagination. Brueggemann asserts the importance of imagination, arguing that both the text and our interpretation of the text are acts of imagination.\textsuperscript{963} He defines imagination as “the capacity to picture (image!) the world out beyond what we take as established given. Imagination is an ability to hold loosely what the world assumes and to walk into alternative contours of reality, which we have only in hint and trace.”\textsuperscript{964} This understanding of imagination has been adopted here. Brown similarly advocates for “exercise of the interpreter’s informed imagination” in theological interpretation.\textsuperscript{965}

Brueggemann also argues that \textit{place} is a significant biblical category that has often been overlooked, advocating a tri-fold focus on Israel, \textit{YHWH}, and the land in

\textsuperscript{961} See further, section 4.4.2 above.
\textsuperscript{962} There is evidence that this is an area where the gap between academy and church is relevant. New Testament scholar Mark Powell conducted two intriguing experiments on responses to the biblical text and found that clergy (academy educated) were likely to respond to questions of meaning in cognitive terms, whereas laity were more likely to respond in terms of emotional impact. See Mark Allan Powell, \textit{Chasing the Eastern Star: Adventures in Reader Response Criticism} (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 28–56.
\textsuperscript{963} Walter Brueggemann, \textit{Redescribing Reality: What We Do When We Read the Bible} (London: SCM, 2009), 28.
interpreting the Old Testament, or as categorised here, anthropo-logic, theo-logic, and cosmo-logic. In recent years, spatiality has become a key area of interest in social-scientific perspectives more broadly and in biblical studies more particularly. Soja’s work delineating space into geophysical realities (firstspace), ideas about space (secondspace), and lived space (thirdspace) is commonly cited. Gert Prinsloo, whose work is drawn upon below, has specifically applied this dimension of critical spatiality to the Psalms of Ascents. His treatment, though, ultimately employs this methodology for historical ends, seeking to discern from the perspectives and motives used in describing space a likely date and authorship for the collection (see section 1.6 above). Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher also examines the collection from this perspective, looking particularly at the ideas of centre and centred world. Some of her insights are also incorporated below. What the present interpretation adds to these studies on spatiality is integration with the use of movement throughout the collection. The goal is not only to appreciate how the text understands space, but also to look at the effect the text has on those who participate in its invitation to imagine themselves entering into and moving within that space.

A variety of terms are used in describing the spatial dimensions in texts and the use of space in performance studies. In the following interpretation, place and space are differentiated according to the analysis of Inge and Brueggemann, who both view

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space as the more abstract concept and place as a subset of space, that which is known and has been given value or meaning,\textsuperscript{971} that is, specific, concrete locations mentioned within the text. This analysis seeks to bring together these ideas of imagination, movement, and spatiality under the term “kinaesthetic,” which is adapted from Avrahami who, in seeking to categorise the senses in the Hebrew Bible, names kinaesthesia or movement as a key way of gaining information about and making sense of the world.\textsuperscript{972}

5.3.3.2 Text

The world of the Psalms of Ascents, or their cosmo-logic, is expressed in the way they talk about geographical and national realities and also in the way they think about space and place and movement within them. The superscription itself uses a spatial description – literally, ascending and metaphorically, pilgrimage.

The collection refers to all kinds of space. Naturally occurring space is named including mountains (Pss 121 and 125), waters and rivers (Pss 124 and 126), and heaven and earth (Pss 121, 124, and 134). These set the collection firmly within the known world of creation. Space as constructed and lived in by people includes cities (Pss 122 and 127) with their ramparts, palaces, and sanctuaries (Pss 122 and 132), as well as houses (Pss 127 and 132) with their tables, beds, and chambers (Pss 128 and 132). Naming these dimensions connects the text to our experience of making use of space. More general spatial language includes words like in, on, with, here, and there, which connect actions and experiences to the spaces within which they occur.

\textsuperscript{971} See John Inge, \textit{A Christian Theology of Place} (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 1; Brueggemann, \textit{The Land}, 5.

The Psalms of Ascents are noted for their high frequency of specific place names. Jerusalem (Pss 122, 125, and 128), Zion (Pss 125, 126, 128, 129, 132, 133, and 134), and Israel (Pss 121, 122, 124, 125, 128, 129, 130, and 131) are all designated places that are named more frequently within the collection than within the Psalter as a whole.\textsuperscript{973} Other places named are Meshech, Kedar, the Negev, Ephrathah, Jaar, and Hermon. The effect of this is to ground the imaginative experience of later users of these psalms in a known, historical place. Clarifications used with these place names in this translation for contemporary hearers attempt to maintain this effect.

As well as naming space and place, the Pilgrim Psalter has a wealth of imagery connected to movement within space. This includes going out and coming in (Pss 121 and 126), feet stumbling and standing (Pss 121 and 122), and hands stretching out (Ps 125). Both cities and people are brought together (Pss 122 and 133), while enemies rise against (Ps 124), turn to crookedness and are led away (Ps 125), or turn back and are passed by (Ps 129). People ascend (Ps 122); oil and dew descend (Ps 133). The community of faith are engulfed and escaped (Ps 124) and rise and wake (Ps 127). \textit{YHWH} dwells above (Ps 123) and is called upon to arise (Ps 132). The cumulative effect of all this movement in the text is to present a world that is open to engagement, one that can be entered into imaginatively and kinaesthetically.

\subsection*{5.3.3.3 Performance}

Performances are said to “take place,” a metaphor we use to mean that they take up actual space and time. Swanson states that the metaphor carries force: anything that actually happens has an effect on the world because physical actions have

\textsuperscript{973} See Hunter, “The Psalms of Ascents,” 178–79, who determines that the Psalms of Ascents contain 4\% of the words in the Psalter but five of the seventeen references to Jerusalem (29\%), nine of the sixty-two to Israel (15\%), and seven of the thirty-six to Zion (19\%).
consequences. By physically embodying a text, a performer acquires a different type of knowledge of its use of space than can be gained by reading or analysing the text. For example, directional and orientational metaphors are pervasive, but might be overlooked in reading and highlighted by performance.

Embodying the collection in performance highlighted that the spatial dimension connects primarily through the imagination of enactors. During my performances, I found the expressions of spatiality and movement within the text generated significant imaginative experiences for me in interpreting and embodying the text. Audience responses affirmed that their imaginations were likewise engaged in visualising the world of the text in terms of the space we were located within and how I moved through it. Thus in the area of cosmo-logic, it seems that one key effect of the text was its ability to engage the imagination kinaesthetically. Visualising the movement and view of space, place, and geography in the text provided insights into the effect these psalms can have on our experience and understanding of the world they portray.

My experience of performing the text and receiving feedback from audience members who participated in those performances suggests that the effect of the text’s descriptions and implications about space and movement engages imaginations and provides a sense of “being there.” Here are some examples:

T1: Moved it into a physical space.
T2: Physicality ... Sense of place ... That place matters.
T6: Helped me engage with place and not page.
T14: I feel I am experiencing [the] movement and journey of the Psalms of Accent.

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974 Swanson, 133–34.
975 McAuley, 217.
976 See Lakoff and Johnson, 14–21.
977 See also section 4.4.2 above.
This is in line with psychological studies suggesting that “mental representations formed during reading are grounded in the perceptual and motoric systems that also govern direct perception and action.” It also correlates with understandings in performance studies that representations of directionality and motion can provide foundations for understanding more abstract dimensions of the text performed, including social relationships, psychological traits, and time.

5.3.4 Relational dimensions

5.3.4.1 Theology as encounter

Many theological approaches to the Psalms have considered the text primarily as a source of information about God with the intent of then arriving at an accurate description of the God the psalms present. Nasuti argues that this is not enough and that an understanding of “the way these texts make available a relationship between God and the believing individuals and communities that have used them” is at least equally as important. In this vein, the third strand I have chosen to focus on is the relational dimension of the psalms, their role as an encounter with the divine. This is an encounter that is “mediated by the faith community and is informed by the history of God’s people” but it is also an approach in which the interpreter’s own stance before God is recognised and celebrated as a significant dimension of the interpretation and use of the text. This approach not only describes the theology of the psalms but also functions

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hermeneutically, using a theological lens that is drawn from the psalms themselves.\textsuperscript{983} Nasuti observes that this approach also fits well with Mowinckel’s view of the cult and is in keeping with Ricoeur and Wittgenstein’s contemporary views of the way language works.\textsuperscript{984}

This is a way of doing theology that is rooted in a present encounter between God and people: “these texts may be used to express and give form to their experience as well as to enable them to embrace a similar faithful relationship with God.”\textsuperscript{985} Rather than merely an objective investigation of what was, it allows for the voices of a variety of interpretive communities to participate in the conversation.\textsuperscript{986} It also takes seriously the poetic nature of the psalms with their preponderance of imagery that engages the right-side of the brain rather than the more analytical left-side.\textsuperscript{987} This can make it appear more subjective but also leaves room for unresolved tensions in the text and tentativeness in the conclusions drawn.\textsuperscript{988} It aligns well with the performance methodology undertaken in this study, entering into the text and seeking to experience it from the inside.

### 5.3.4.2 Text

The collection contains only a handful of declarations about YHWH’s character and other explicit theological statements. The theology of the text is instead apparent in its dynamic two-way relational dimension that has the effect of inviting enactors to participate in a three-way conversation: \textit{with} YHWH and with one another \textit{about} YHWH’s actions and activity.

\textsuperscript{983} Jacobson, “Christian Theology,” 506.

\textsuperscript{984} Nasuti, “God at Work,” 35.

\textsuperscript{985} \textit{Ibid.}, 43.

\textsuperscript{986} Beth Tanner, “Rethinking the Enterprise: What Must Be Considered in Formulating a Theology of the Psalms,” in \textit{Soundings in the Theology of the Psalms}: 139–150, 142.

\textsuperscript{987} \textit{Ibid.}, 142–43; see also Nasuti, “God at Work,” 39.

\textsuperscript{988} See Tanner, 145–46.
The dialogical nature of these psalms, similar to the Psalter as a whole, functions as an invitation to enter into conversation with YHWH. Seven psalms in the collection directly address YHWH. These include both singular forms, the words of an individual before God (Pss 120, 130, and 131), and plural forms, with the community speaking together in supplication (Pss 123, 125, 126, and 132). The act of speaking and embodying these psalms therefore engages us in both individual and corporate prayer. Despite the absence in the collection of the Psalter’s most familiar call to worship, לְהֵדַע, there are exhortations to praise YHWH, using בָּרוּחַ, in Psalms 124 and 134. The collection as a whole becomes an invitation to worship.

The psalms also provide words for community members to share with one another about YHWH, describing his character (Pss 129 and 130) and his actions (Pss 121, 126, 127, and 132). YHWH is repeatedly described as the maker of heaven and earth (Pss 121, 124, and 134), emphasising his creational authority. The few declarations that are made about YHWH’s attributes – righteousness (Ps 129), faithful love, forgiveness, and redemption (Ps 130) – echo descriptions found throughout the Hebrew Bible in the stories of his involvement with his people. They therefore function to draw later readers and enactors into that story and its continuing impact.

There are no direct metaphors in the collection about YHWH, none of the familiar images including king, rock, and refuge found throughout the rest of the Psalter. Instead, there are a number of implicit metaphors, where an image is used for the people from which a corresponding role for YHWH can be inferred (Pss 120, 123, 125, and 131). It could be argued that the effect of this implicit imagery, where only the human side of the relational metaphor is stated, is to draw focus not primarily to who YHWH is, but to what it means for us to be in relationship with him.
5.3.4.3 Performance

This relational dimension of the Pilgrim Psalter is accentuated in performance. The dynamics and interplay between the different voices in the psalms are both heard and visualised. Clear decisions need to be made about when the text is addressing YHWH directly and when it is addressing the audience and how these conversations work together. The public nature of performance means that even personal prayers have a corporate dimension, as confession and plea take place in the context of the community.

Performing these psalms, I was very aware that engagement between the audience and myself was not the only, or even the primary, relational dynamic present. By directly speaking to YHWH I embodied a relationship with him to the audience, a relationship that at times they were invited to observe and at other times to enter into as well. Feedback received from the audience confirms that the relational dimension of the collection was key to the way they entered into its theology. For example:

R5: How focused on relationship with God they were.

T1: [It is] more about relationship of God, author, hearers than about abstract theology.

T8: The depth of relationship between the psalmist and YHWH.

M10: The sense of immediacy between the psalmist and the Lord God.

The relational dimension of these psalms is thus one of their key effects on those who engage with them and provides the entry point into discovering their theo-logic.

5.4 Waypoint

This explanation of terminology and approaches has sought to provide a kind of guidemap in preparation for the journey of theological interpretation of the Pilgrim Psalter undertaken in Chapters 6–8. It is therefore appropriate to pause here before
embarking on that journey and gather together the tools provided. The Psalms of Ascents are theologically interpreted in light of their shared superscription, allowing it to function as a significant hermeneutical lens and performance frame. The subsequent chapters seek to discern the distinctive theological witness of these psalms, particularly their transformative effect on communities of faith who join in their use. This is done using the dialogical rhythm of text and performance. The term “enactors” is used for those who choose to enter into the text in this way, highlighting the nature of these texts as more than words on a page but an invitation to embodied participation. This interpretation has a particular focus on the affective, kinaesthetic, and relational dimensions of the text, the connections between these effects and the collection’s unfolding anthropo-logic, cosmo-logic, and theo-logic, and the way the Pilgrim Psalter functions to reframe the world for those who enact it.
Chapter 6: The frame and contours of pilgrimage

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a theological interpretation of the first three psalms of the collection, along with the superscription, which is based on both careful analysis and translation of the text and insights gleaned from performance of that translation. Key dimensions of the text that emerged from the performances – affective, kinaesthetic, and relational – are considered together in terms of how they express the text’s anthropo-logic, cosmo-logic, and theo-logic.

6.2 Superscription: Framing

Psalm superscriptions have often been viewed as of less value than the rest of the text, with debate focusing on their perceived lack of historical authenticity. More recently, they have been understood as examples of early reception history, reflecting an early process of interpretation. The canonical approach taken here understands them to provide an “associative” reading, which frames the way later communities interpret the psalm. Similarly, in performances of the text they function as a framing device that provides a coherent setting for the collection as a whole. As outlined in section 3.3.3.2 above, the psalm superscriptions belong to their canonical form and have hermeneutical significance in theological interpretation of the collection. The focus in this thesis is not

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on the historical information they might offer, but on the effect they have by providing an interpretive lens for readers, hearers, and enactors. The shared superscription is what marks Psalms 120–134 as a collection and provides the boundaries for this study. Accepting the broad consensus on their meaning (see section 1.8 above) and translating them as “a song of the pilgrimage” (see section 3.2.1 above), this section considers how they function as a hermeneutical lens and performance frame.

6.2.1 Text

Discussion of the Psalms has often been dominated by considerations of genre, meaning that the fifteen psalms of this collection are separated out due to their variety of forms. The shared superscription serves to bring them together, uniting them as a collection despite their apparent differences. This unity can then serve to highlight their rich intra-textuality and resonant imagery. The use of תהל in their titles, a word used in the Psalter with an exclusively positive and religious meaning, connects these psalms overtly to their use by the community in worship. It serves as a reminder that these psalms are intended to be performed or enacted, rather than merely read. The use of לִמְדוּת provides enactors with pilgrimage as a context within which to imagine the theological implications of the text.

Five psalms in the collection also include a connection to David (Pss 122, 124, 131, and 133) or Solomon (Ps 127). Such associations with key figures in Israel’s history provide an additional interpretive lens for these psalms, inviting the enacting community to participate in an act of “theology by analogy” and providing a concrete context for these psalms within the covenant relationship between YHWH and Israel.

992 See, for example, Goldingay, 752.
993 Brunert, “תהל,” TDOT, 14:626.
994 VanGemeren and Stanghelle, 300.
995 See German, 191, who proposes that editions of the Psalms published without the superscriptions tend to make the poems “existentialized.”
6.2.2 Performance

The repeated superscription at the beginning of each psalm serves both to link them together and to demarcate them from one another. In my performances, they therefore functioned as a framing device. The function of a frame is to focus the gaze by drawing attention to what is contained within it. As a common frame, the superscription highlights the connections between different psalms in the collection and enables enactors to view, experience, and interpret the collection as a whole. The superscription also functioned in my performances to provide pauses between each individual psalm, allowing for movement between locations and shifts in address or emotional tone without further need for explanation.

The repeated use of the word pilgrimage in the titles led me to visualise myself as a pilgrim during the performances and audience feedback suggests they similarly perceived me as such. It also invited all present to understand the collection as a pilgrimage, entering into the performance as a journey with expectations that it would take us from one place to another in some way. Pilgrimage became an underlying metaphor for the relationship the psalms describe and enact between the community speaking and the God to/of whom they speak. A number of audience members commented on this, for example:

C11: In modern times, these [titles] would be a movie synopsis. They tell a story, making the audience part of the story and the storytelling.

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997 See Richard Shusterman, “Art as Dramatization,” The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 59 (4) (2001): 363–372, 369: “Framing focuses its object, action, or feeling more clearly and thus sharpens, highlights, enlivens. Just as a magnifying glass heightens the sun’s light and heat by the concentration of its refracting frame, so art’s frame intensifies the power its experienced content wields on our affective life, rendering that content far more vivid and significant.”
M6: The possibility that this canonical unit outlines or conveys one’s entire moral-theological pilgrimage.998

T13: Pilgrimage is a perfect descriptor – the psalms spoke to me of the journey we take in life.

The idea of pilgrimage is inescapably connected to place, as any pilgrimage must include a starting location, a path to be travelled, and a destination. Hence, I found references within the collection to such places were highlighted: for example, the prominence of Jerusalem within the text was accentuated as it was viewed as the goal of physical pilgrimage; whereas references to home and family took on the nuance of separation and distance, as those whom pilgrims have left behind for a time but to whom they will return. Mentions of pathways also had heightened significance as I imagined myself as a pilgrim currently walking between places.

Pilgrimage is also tied to ideas of movement. Pilgrims are *en route*, making their way and being transformed. Pilgrimage is a liminal state.999 This backdrop enabled me to see within the collection a structure of departure, journey, and arrival, with a sense of progression throughout, although this is not simply linear from beginning to end. Furthermore, the location of each psalm in the imagined space of a pilgrimage highlighted groupings within the collection, particularly the first three psalms, which move from far away to the centre at Jerusalem, and the final three psalms, which all “take place” in Jerusalem. Vocabulary and metaphors connected to spatiality and kinaesthesia also became more prominent due to this frame, as seen in the discussions below. The progression in any pilgrimage is also spiritual, connected to ideas of growth and transformation. The purpose is depth, not simply distance.1000 The way I presented

998 See also section 4.4.2 above.
the relationship between the speaker and YHWH in these psalms was therefore influenced by the idea of being a pilgrim seeking to draw closer to God.

Finally, the fact that pilgrimage is a commonly used metaphor for life, particularly in the context of a faith community where being a “pilgrim people” is part of our self identification, provided an immediate application by analogy for aspects of the collection related specifically to physical life in ancient Israel. For example, walking through the mountains can be connected to traversing the ups and downs of life, while Jerusalem as a destination can be seen as representing the gathered community in worship in the new creation.

6.3 Psalms 120–122: Mapping

The first three psalms of the collection have often been grouped together, as they appear to map the entire pilgrimage journey from far away (Ps 120), along the way (Ps 121), to Jerusalem (Ps 122) as well as moving from lament (Ps 120) to praise (Ps 122). As such, they can be viewed as presenting an introduction to the collection and they are presented here as such. There is no sharp disjunction between Psalms 122 and 123, however, and as the intent of this study is to consider the collection as a whole, this break should not be over-emphasised but rather functions similarly to the other “waypoints” throughout this theological interpretation.

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1002 See James Leo Garrett, Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2009), 70.
6.4 Psalm 120: Departing

6.4.1 Text

This psalm has been variously described as an individual lament or a thanksgiving song, primarily dependent on the temporal understanding of verses 1–2. It does not neatly fit either category, particularly as it remains open-ended, with no move to describe the intervention of YHWH. As the first psalm of the collection, it locates the speaker and community in the experience of distress and distance, while hinting at the possibilities to come due to the background of YHWH’s past answering.

The opening words of the collection, יהוה (v. 1), place the focus squarely on the one who is addressed. The psalmist does not use the simple possessive for the distress described, with the more emphatic ו (v. 1) highlighting the personal nature of the distress for the one reciting or enacting the poem. The collection is anchored in the present condition of the one speaking. Although cry and answer are both recounted, the shift in verb tenses from יתור in (v. 1) implies that the petition currently being described is based upon a previous answering. Once the poem has been set in the present distress, the reader is immediately reminded that there have been events prior to this, hinting at an unspoken theological or liturgical “back-story.” The collection thus begins with a double orientation: the present experience of distress and alienation, together with the acknowledgement of God’s past faithfulness.

Although there is one voice speaking throughout the poem, the performative nature of the psalm is demonstrated in the clear shifts in address from YHWH (v. 2), to the tongue (vv. 3–4), to others (v. 5), as well as in the answering of its own rhetorical question in verse 4, all of which can be conveyed by tone and gesture. The tongue could

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1004 See Hossfeld and Zenger, 303.
1005 See note on this verse in section 3.3.2 above.
belong to an enemy or to the psalmist, making verses 3–4 either a warning either to others or to the self.\(^{1006}\) This provides the setting for the interjection הֵיהוָא (v. 5), an almost involuntary, onomatopoetic exclamation of grief and despair.\(^{1007}\)

The geographical references קְשָׁם and קְרִים (v. 5) function as metaphors for distance from the community and combined with the reference to being a sojourner, נֹב (v. 5), make subtle allusions to the experience of a pilgrim that are brought to the fore when the psalm is read in light of the title. The speaker then contrasts themselves with the people of these places, in verse 7 presenting themselves as peace personified, מָטַר. The link to speech, דּוֹקָם (v. 7), indicates a declaration by the psalmist, choosing not to be the person of lying lips or deceitful tongue mentioned earlier. The psalm ends with a clear contrast between those the psalmist has long, דּוֹקָם (v. 6), dwelt amongst and the self, setting the stage for movement away from these others and toward YHWH’s community, which is expressed through the following two psalms and the collection as a whole.

### 6.4.2 Performance

After the superscription, the first word of the collection is a directional marker, קַנָּא (v. 1). This initial address is spoken about, rather than to, YHWH and indicates that he is in a different space to the community being addressed. In my performances, I looked upwards during the first two words to establish the dynamic of another realm or space in which YHWH is present but separate from the audience/community. Kinaesthetically, the text thus sets up an important differentiation between two spaces, here and there, later in the collection explicitly named as earth and heaven.

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\(^{1006}\) See comment in section 6.4.2 below for how my performances shaped my interpretation of these verses.

\(^{1007}\) See J-M, §105b; E. Jenni, “יָרְדָה,” TLOT, 1:357.
The opening words, הַיּוֹדֵעַ (v. 1), assume rather than establish the relational dimension present in the collection. Enactors are already in relationship with YHWH. The past history of this relationship is immediately recalled and evoked. This psalm recounts a previous calling on YHWH and his response (v. 1), reminding all of their identity as the people of God and allowing this identity to function as the foundation for their experience of enacting these psalms. In my performances, this opening callback to the past functioned as a testimony to the audience, declaring myself as in an established relationship with YHWH where there was trust in looking to him and confidence in knowing his response. The text thus invites enactors to view themselves as those in a relationship of dependence upon YHWH and to see YHWH as their God who has been faithful in the past and is therefore present to hear and respond to them now. This relationship provides the basis for the cry for salvation, הִנֵּה (v. 2). YHWH can be relied upon to hear, intervene, and rescue because of the community’s experience of him having done so in the past. The deferential form of the request establishes that this is not a relationship of equals and YHWH is not presumed upon but looked to with hopeful anticipation.

In terms of its affective impact, the collection opens with an explicit recounting of the feeling of distress, heightened by the intimacy of the phrasing: “distress that is mine.” (v. 1) Recounting these words in performances, I detected a melancholy tone in my voice and observed a welling up of sadness as I repeated these words. Enactors are invited to enter into this emotion for themselves. The expression is initially generalised, allowing any experience of sorrow or unease to be evoked. The emotion is described as having led to action on the part of the psalmist: a cry for deliverance. (v. 2) In recounting this action to audiences, I observed feeling vulnerable in sharing an experience of personal need. This too functions as an emotional invitation for enactors:
as they consider their own crying and requests for help, feelings including helplessness, oppression, or even guilt are engendered. YHWH’s answer to the psalmist’s cry is not held back. Attending to this impact in performance, my tone of voice grew in confidence. By identifying YHWH’s involvement up front (v. 1), a sense of reassurance can be felt by the community even as they experience emotions associated with their own weakness. As Psalm 120 unfolds in time and space, the occasion of the distress is particularised. The images of lying lip and deceitful tongue (v. 2) could refer to enemies, but in the context of performing the collection, I found it felt much more natural to imagine them referring to the self. They therefore evoke feelings of guilt, remorse, and contrition as one imagines the likelihood that these descriptions could apply to one’s own actions.

As verse 3 was taken to address the self, represented by the tongue, this use of a body part grounds the enactor in time and space. In my performances, I gestured to my body when asking the questions of “you” and to my mouth specifically when the tongue was named. This drew attention to my physical presence. One effect of these questions is thus to highlight the community’s awareness of the space they inhabit.

As the psalm shifts to its question directed toward the deceitful tongue, לְשׁון הרְעָה (v. 3), a further aspect of YHWH’s character is implicitly revealed: there is an understanding that the very thing the speaker requires YHWH’s intervention to be delivered from will result in judgment (v. 4) if such deliverance is not forthcoming. YHWH is thus spoken to as both saviour and judge, both deliverer from and punisher of evil. In my performances, I observed during this psalm how the relationship I was called to embody with YHWH is not simplistic but multidimensional and even seemingly paradoxical. The text gives YHWH space to be more than one thing at a time and
therefore precludes enactors from responding to him as if he is bland, safe, or domesticated.¹⁰⁰⁸

The possibility of judgment, educed by the images of arrows and burning coals (v. 4), could provoke fear, but in my experience in the context of a worshiping community, evoked penitence. The intentionally affective exclamation, “Woe is me!” (v. 5),¹⁰⁰⁹ intensifies this, leading enactors to sadness at their situation, יִשְׁמָרְתָּנָּה (v. 5a), being far away and amongst people who are not of peace (vv. 5b–6), as well as recapitulating the feeling of distress. In my performances, I perceived a sense of dislocation between myself and the community (represented by the audience) produced by the powerfully personal nature of the interjection. This pre-empted the reason for the cry, which might at first glance in reading the text appear unexpected. It is not the actions of the speaker per se, but rather the experience of isolation from the faith community, dramatically described as dwelling far away amongst enemies (v. 5), which brings the greatest sense of despair. I noted the way the modifiers “long” and “my life itself” (v. 6) heightened this emotion in my performances. I further perceived that the statement about the self, “I am peace” (v. 7), evoked a tone that seemed to be seeking to convince the audience, and even myself, that this was true. Although these descriptions are primarily about people and place, in my performances I noticed that their placement at the end of this psalm allowed them to create a sense of relational distance for me not only from the community of faith, but consequently from YHWH himself. The text thus calls enactors to consider that despite the potential dangers of being in YHWH’s presence as judge, there is a far greater loss experienced when distant from him.

¹⁰⁰⁹ See Burke, 127–28, on the range of affective linguistic devices including emphasisers, downtoners, hedges, and amplifiers.
In the second half of the psalm, the I-speaker recounts the experience of dwelling in far away places, at the margins of lived experience (v. 5). These literal geographical references were translated for my performances with words designed to evoke the same images of distance and isolation. I gestured off stage right at this point, evoking both the sense of negative space subconsciously connected with the audience’s left, as well as the more general idea that outside the present enacting community is “other.” By using geographical images to represent ideas of “them” and “me/us,” the text thus allows enactors to view the world imaginatively as consisting of two kinds of place – there and here.

The juxtaposing of “war,” מלחמה, and “peace,” שלום (vv. 6–7), along with the description of the other as a hater of peace, sets up a clear emotional choice for enactors. I performed this with a dismissive attitude toward “them,” (v. 7) evoking a sense of contempt. The text thus encourages enactors toward the right choice. Security and contentment are not found in the experience of isolation. The implication is that the individual pilgrim needs connection with both YHWH and the community of faith to experience the emotional benefits of שלום.

The first step on the emotional journey for enactors, therefore, is one of distress and isolation. At the same time, moreover, an underlying foundation of reassurance is found in both the fronting of YHWH’s intervention and in the very act of participating in enacting the collection as a member of the faith community. This first psalm also establishes a number of spatial dimensions that are important for the collection as a whole: earth and heaven (v. 1), the dwelling places of YHWH and people respectively; and community space and other space (vv. 5–6), the dwelling places of the people of YHWH and of everyone else. Relationally, this first psalm presupposes a history of

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1010 See Kuhn, 37–55, who lists a range of ways writers can drive the affective dimension of texts including sequencing.
YHWH’s faithfulness that functions as the basis for praying and entering into the collection. The isolation of the individual speaker from the community also creates a sense of relational distance between them and YHWH.

In light of the collection as a whole, this first psalm can be seen as representing a departure point for the pilgrimage. By enacting it, we name emotional distress, spatial distance, and relational isolation in order to leave them behind to embark upon the journey forward.

6.5 Psalm 121: Walking

6.5.1 Text

This psalm has been described as a liturgy, a cultic dialogue, and words of assurance, all of which attempt to come to terms with its performative and dialogical nature. In light of the title, its appropriateness for use by pilgrims, possibly dialoguing with a priestly speaker, is evident and affirmed by the geographical references. The repetition of key words and poetic rhythm make it well suited to memorisation and performance in both Hebrew and English. The metaphors emphasise YHWH’s protective character as well as his elevation above all other kings and gods. References to the psalmist’s eyes, foot, and hand, as well as day and night and coming and going, emphasise the whole of life and also suggest the idea of walking or journeying through life. In contrast to the previous psalm, the speaker is no longer located in distress, but is moving forward in confidence because of who YHWH is.

Translating the yiqtol verbs consistently as present tense captures the idea that as the performer or community recites the psalm, they do what it says and thereby enact it.

1011 Gunkel and Begrich, 192.
1012 Kraus, Psalms 60–150, 428.
1013 Gerstenberger, Psalms, Part II, 324.
1014 This might explain the unique variation of the shared superscription.
Lifting the eyes (v. 1) is not merely a physical action but metaphorically indicates desire or longing.⁹¹⁵ Some have suggested an allusion to the idolatrous high places with אֲרָכוֹת (v.1),⁹¹⁶ but even a straightforward geographical reference hints at the implicit contrast between all other mountains and Zion, from where YHWH reigns.⁹¹⁷ Invoking YHWH’s creative activity, לְשׁוֹן הָעַלְמָא (v. 2), alludes both to elevation above any other gods and to the ability to care for creation.⁹¹⁸

The change from first to second person at verse 3 suggests some form of dialogue within this psalm,⁹¹⁹ underlining its inherently performative nature. There are ten second-person pronominal suffixes in verses 3–8, affirming that YHWH is the answer to the supplicant’s question. The key word שֵׁבֶץ occurs six times within this psalm (vv. 3, 4, 5, 7a, 7b, 8), and another six times within the collection (Pss 127:1 (x 2); 130:3, 6 (x 2); 132:13). An everyday word meaning “to watch, keep,” its usage nevertheless demonstrates what is highly valued by its subject.⁹²⁰ Thus it emphasises YHWH’s care for and protection of his people. There might also be an allusion to its prominent use in the Aaronic blessing (Num 6:24–26).⁹²¹

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¹⁰¹⁵ See E. Jenni, “‘זֶב,’” TLOT, 2:877. The same phrase is used positively in Ps 123:1, whereas the negative metaphor of raised eyes in Ps 131:1 uses נַשֵּׁב instead of שֵׁבֶץ.
¹⁰¹⁶ Marrs, “The Šyry-Hm’lwt,” 29; Terrien, 812; Leonard P. Maré, “Some Remarks on Yahweh’s Protection against Mythological Powers in Psalm 121,” in Psalms and Mythology: 170–180, 174. However, the phrase is not used this way elsewhere in the Psalter and there is no need to read it this way here. Another negative way of reading the reference is to suggest the “dangerous” journey of a pilgrim to Jerusalem, see, for example, Bob Becking, “God-Talk for a Disillusioned Pilgrim in Psalm 121,” JHS 9 (2009): 2–10, 6, however this might arise from reading later stories (e.g. the Good Samaritan) back into the text and is not indicated from the context itself.
¹⁰¹⁷ See Hossfeld and Zenger, 322–23.
¹⁰¹⁸ See also Norman C. Habel, “‘Yahweh, Maker of Heaven and Earth’: A Study in Tradition Criticism,” JBL 91 (1972): 321–337, who argues that the formula is an appropriation and “polemical reformulation” of a title given to the Canaanite god El.
¹⁰¹⁹ See Alter, 437; Terrien, 811; Gerstenberger, Psalms: Part II, 323; Hossfeld and Zenger, 318–19.
¹⁰²⁰ F. García López, “םָכַס,” TDOT, 15:288. Here, variations of the English word “guard” have been used to translate throughout the collection due to its flexibility of usage as both noun and verb. See also Jutta Hausmann, “Zur Sprachwelt von Psalm 121” in Metaphors in the Psalms (ed. Pierre Van Hecke and Antje Labahn; Leuven: Peeters, 2010): 47–54, 48–49.
The two parallel terms for sleep, מַיִן (v. 4), serve to emphasise the sureness of the response: יתוה is not inactive. Identification of the guardian is deferred in verses 1–4, but is declared emphatically in verse 5 with a non-verbal phrase and by the placement of the Tetragrammaton at the beginning of each half of the verse. יתוה is further described as נַעַל (v. 5), literally “shadow,” used figuratively here to add to the picture of protection and care. The metaphor evokes the image of יתוה as a strong tree (as in Hos 14:6–8), but in its ANE context might also suggest royal power inspired by the shaded canopies seen over kings (as in Lam 4:20).

The dangers of the sun and moon (v. 6) might have been understood as primarily physical, but the negation of these can also connote their impotence as astral deities. is used in verse 7 both negatively (protection from evil) and positively (care over life), indicating the totality of יתוה’s guardianship. רַעַם (v. 8) is most naturally read as a merism, again highlighting the totality of יתוה’s care, this time within space. There could even be a subtle allusion to the going out of pilgrimage and returning home. The psalm ends with the first of three uses of the formula מֵאֱלָה רַעַם וְעִיר (v. 8) in the collection (see Pss 125:2; 131:3): the totality of יתוה’s care also extends to all time.

102 See M. Delcor, “ textStyle,” TLOT, 2:478, on the theological use of sleep to mean inactivity. This might be a subtle polemic against other gods who do sleep.
1023 See Hunter, An Introduction to the Psalms, 63–65, who notes the number of English translations that lose the poetic effect of verses 3–5 by changing the order of ideas into more “conventional” English.
1024 See BDB, 853.
1025 See Hossfeld and Zenger, 327.
1028 LXX reverses the order το εἰσοδὸν σου και τὴν ἐξοδὸν σου (“your coming and your going”), which strengthens the allusion. See also David G. Barker, “The Lord Watches Over You: A Pilgrimage Reading of Psalm 121,” BSac 152 (1995): 163–181.
6.5.2 Performance

The relational distance at the end of Psalm 120 provokes the opening question of the subsequent psalm: where can “help,” יָּכָר (v. 1), be found? The immediate answer (v. 2a) points enactors back to YHWH, who is designated for the first of three times in the collection as “maker of heaven and earth,” נֹסֵרָה שְׁמִירָ לִאָדָם (v. 2b). In my performances, I found this expansive description functioned as a reminder of YHWH’s sovereign power, as well as of the fact that this is available to all. By pointing to YHWH’s role over the whole universe, the text has the effect of placing the relationship between enactors and YHWH in a cosmic context. Imagining themselves as pilgrims journeying to meet with the God of Israel in Jerusalem, they concurrently understand that this same God is present with them in any location along the way or indeed throughout the world. Adding another complex, multiform dimension to their relational experience, he is present with them even as they travel to meet with him. As one audience member noted:

R8: Maybe God was as much to be found on their way home, after the pilgrimage as he is in the intense moment/s of the journey to Jerusalem and the stay in the holy city.

The second psalm in the collection thus offers an emotional turn, taking one on a journey toward the security lacking in the first. In my performances, I experienced feelings of optimism and hope in entering into this text. The opening question (v. 1), as a genuine question, locates the questioner in the experience of both need and expectation, feeling both desire and hope for help. The answer immediately given (v. 2) provides relief and security. This would be reinforced if the psalm was enacted by a community with different individuals taking on the voices of questioner and answerer. As an individual, I was able to place myself in each role in turn, imaginatively experiencing the reassurance provided.
Psalm 121 also begins with spatial imagery, the lifting of the heads and eyes and the scene imagined that of being surrounded by mountains (v. 1). In my performances, I looked up and around at this point rather than directly heavenward, picturing the hills surrounding Jerusalem, and one audience member explicitly commented on the experience of “seeing” the mountains. \textsuperscript{1029} This imagined setting provokes a sense of awe as the individual recognises how small their physical presence is in relationship to the majesty of mountains. It may also elicit fear, as the possible dangers of unseen enemies lurking behind the hills is contemplated. \textsuperscript{1030} In my performances, however, I felt that the question of looking for help was being sought beyond the self and thus rather than fear, I experienced anticipation at the possibilities of the journey. With the title having framed the psalm as one for pilgrimage, the imagery evoked was therefore one of excitement at the journey. \textsuperscript{1031} YHWH is then explicitly named as the maker of both heaven and earth (v. 2), providing reassurance that the mountains are not to be feared as they are under his control, moreover, they are to be admired as his handiwork. The gesture I used in my performances at this point was commented on by a number of audience members as particularly memorable, leading them to picture the whole of creation as in view. For example:

T11: ... heaven and earth – emphasising the difference of the 2 domains.

The cosmo-logic of the psalm is clear: all of creation is YHWH’s and therefore under his care.

The psalm then returns to the human body, with the first desire expressed that the pilgrim’s “foot,” בֵּי, might not stumble (v. 3a). This grounds the psalm in the imagery of walking, presenting physical space as that through which to be traversed. In

\textsuperscript{1029} R8: “The person sitting next to me is an artist and she said she could “see” the mountains ...”

\textsuperscript{1030} See the note on this verse in section 3.4.2 above.

\textsuperscript{1031} Prinsloo, “The Role of Space,” 463, calls this psalm “a journey from negative to positive space.”
my performances, as I looked down and gestured to my feet, this line caused me to imagine literally walking safely and securely, as well as metaphorically being kept from harm. In the context of the pilgrimage title of the collection, walking becomes for enactors a metaphor for their life as a community in relationship with YHWH. The image of YHWH as shade on the right hand (v. 5b) might have different meanings for different cultures. I looked down at my right hand in performance and initially found this an awkward image. However, in later performances, I pictured a shadow falling on my hand, moving with me as I moved, which provided a sense of the close ongoing presence of YHWH evoked. The protection he provides travelling each step of the journey is thus highlighted in multiple ways for enactors. The references to “day,” יומ, and “night,” לילה (v. 6), indicate that this journey is ongoing rather than short or completed. The references to the “sun,” שמש, and “moon,” לילה (v. 6), denote the dangers of the creation itself and provide assurance that YHWH is able to protect from them. Both function as metonymies, with the two parts standing in for the whole. Every place, every time, is covered. The closing line of the psalm brings together two more metonymies, one for space and one for time (v. 8). Coming and going evokes all the journeys and experiences of walking through life, while now and forever encompass every moment in between. I had prepared hand gestures to convey each of these and as I performed them to audiences, they led me to imagine my words encompassing each and every situation of each person present. Thus enactors can imagine the whole of their lives, every part, under the guardianship and care of YHWH.

The descriptions of YHWH found through this psalm, particularly the repeated use of the word “guard,” לlasting (vv. 3, 4, 5, 7, 8), similarly engender a sense of being

1032 In one location (T) there was a step near where I was standing at this point and in the moment of performance I considered “stumbling” down on it, but immediately realised that this was in fact the opposite effect intended by the text.
1033 See comments on this verse in section 3.4.2 above.
protected and looked after as a pilgrim, whether on a physical or metaphorical journey. The jussives in verse 3 coupled with the second person address led me to speak these assurances directly to the audience in performances, putting me in the position of being the one who reassures others, which brought conviction to the statements being made. Enactors of the psalm can thus feel reassured by the promises whether spoken to or by them, providing confidence to move forward. The expansiveness of the imagery of protection – both from all harm and in all situations (vv. 7–8) – intensifies the emotions of security and contentment and was noted by audience members. For example:

T3: God is to be and can be called upon in all circumstances.

R5: These texts convey a sense that God is central to all life and ... at all times, in all situations and in all ways.

Embodying these words with accompanying gestures, I recognised their broad scope and the way this engenders trust. The underlying feeling of security felt in the midst of the first psalm’s distress is thus quickly made explicit when enacting the collection as a whole.

The specific requests enactors are invited to make of YHWH provide further insight into the way the text calls them to view their relationship with him. Together, the requests for protection in keeping their foot from “stumbling,” יָמָן (v. 3a), and the request for attentiveness in not “sleeping,” אֲשֶׁר (v. 3b), present a picture of a God who is engaged with his people, actively caring for them. This is affirmed and extended in a series of declarations enactors then make to one another about who YHWH is (vv. 4–8). The key word “guard,” נַצֵּל, reiterates the relational aspect of attentive involvement. The other descriptors give depth and breadth to this: his constant wakefulness ensures no break in his watching (v. 4a), his protection from the sun and moon that no external barrier can prevent his care (v. 6), and his protection from all evil that no enemy can get
past him (v. 7a). The concluding pairs of spatial and temporal counterparts (v. 8) confirm that his care is for all places and all times. The overall effect is therefore to present YHWH as with his people in every possible way as they walk their journey.

6.6 Psalm 122: Arriving

6.6.1 Text

The shifts between first, second, and third person voices as well as the interplay between singular and plural perspectives suggest numerous possibilities for performance of this psalm.\textsuperscript{1034} The connections to pilgrimage are palpable and there is movement from historical recollection about the place of Jerusalem to hope for its future. Poetic features – including paronomasia, alliteration, parallelism, and repetition, as well as the personification of Jerusalem in direct address – affirm its suitability for memorisation and worship. Numerous connections to broad theological themes throughout the Hebrew Bible suggest a rich vein of intertextual and interpretive possibilities.

The psalm begins with a recollection of the past. \( \text{ךְ֥֑נֶּכֶת} \) (v. 1) is used frequently in the Psalter but only here in the collection. It appears prominently in Deuteronomy in connection with worship at the central sanctuary and pilgrimage festivals.\textsuperscript{1035} As in 2 Sam 7, \( \text{כַּעַבָּר} \) (v. 1) is a key word. In particular, there is interplay between the house of YHWH and the house of David. The structure of the psalm, with YHWH’s house named at the beginning and end and David’s in the middle, calls attention to both houses. The recollection continues with the recounting of “standing,” \( \text{לְמָבוֹת} \) (v. 2), in the city gates,

\textsuperscript{1034} See David C. Mitchell, “Deciphering the Masoretic Cantillation,” in \textit{Jewish and Christian Approaches to the Psalms: Conflict and Convergence:} 119–133, 130, who proposes shifts from “the solo cantor to the Levite chorus.”

\textsuperscript{1035} Deut 12:7, 12, 18; 14:26; 16:11, 14; 26:11.
with the vocative address of the city herself, ירושלים (v. 2), adding to the picture of joy, now due to the speaker’s arrival at the pilgrimage destination.

The shift to third person in verse 3 indicates a turn toward the listeners, inviting them to share the speaker’s wonder and delight at the city. The repetition of the city’s name in verse 3, as well as the use of the aurally resonant words עיר (v. 3) and ירושלים (vv. 6, 7, 8), draws focus to the personified city. Jerusalem is then described in manifold ways: ירושלים (v. 3) evoking her history and prominence, ירושלם (v. 3) the community experienced within her, ירושלם (v. 4) her character as pilgrimage destination, ירושלם (v. 4) her role as the place of worship commanded in the Torah, ירושלם (v. 4) the praise of YHWH that takes place within her, ירושלם (v. 5) her function as royal seat, ירושלם (v. 5) her role as the place of just judgment, ירושלם (v. 5) her history and connection with David, and ירושלם (v. 7) – prominent architectural features – the security and protection from harm she provides. In light of Jerusalem’s place in the lives of the community, listeners are enjoined to seek her ירושלים (vv. 6, 7, 8), ירושלם (v. 7), and ירושלם (v. 9), that is, all that might continue to allow her to flourish. This is explicitly for the sake of the people who “love,” אהב (v.6), her, the speaker’s family/community, אהב (v. 8), and for the sake of the God of the community, emphasised by the plural pronoun on the divine designator א樂נח (v. 9).

6.6.2 Performance

The companionship of YHWH expressed in Psalm 121 is juxtaposed with the reason for pilgrimage, explicated in the succeeding psalm. The pilgrims are making their way to the “house of YHWH,” בית יהוה, (v. 1), to his dwelling place even as he dwells with them along the way. In my performances, I found that embodying the joy expressed in making this journey caused me to understand that greater depth of relational experience
was being envisaged in visiting YHWH’s house. The placement of this psalm early in the collection means that this sense of expectation becomes part of the overall relational experience for enactors, so that even as they experience intimacy with YHWH throughout the collection, they are drawn onward toward something more.

The opening verb of Psalm 122, “rejoiced,” נָפָל (v. 1), thus takes enactors one further emotional step. There has been movement from distress and isolation, to security, and now to celebration. In my performances, I observed the way simply saying the words “I rejoiced” (v. 1) automatically brought a smile to my face, with this physical embodiment then provoking the emotion both within me and within audience members, a clear example of “emotional contagion.”

The circumstance that elicits this joy is the invitation to join other pilgrims in the journey to YHWH’s house (v. 1), providing a response to the sense of isolation felt in Psalm 120. The contrast is clear: isolation from YHWH and the community provokes distress, whereas membership in the worshiping pilgrimage community is cause for elation. As my performances unfolded in time and space, I observed this contrast in my own feelings, which then became evident in my tone of voice and engagement with the audience. These psalms thereby convey an emotional low and a high and lead enactors to desire the latter for themselves.

Kinaesthetically, this pilgrimage psalm invites enactors to imagine themselves journeying to Jerusalem as they enter into the text. The content of the invitation from the community to the individual is based on the verb “to walk,” נָשַׁב, inviting enactors to imagine themselves moving toward the house of YHWH (v. 1b). The shift from singular to plural (v. 1b) can also have the effect of this journey being imagined as one from private space to public space.

The following line has pilgrims speaking as if they have arrived (v. 2). During my performances, I envisaged myself standing in the

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1036 See Beeman, 283 (who refers to the extensive study of Paul Ekman); Adolphs, 182.
temple gates at this point, having reached the place of pilgrimage, with the repetition of
the name “Jerusalem” (vv. 2b, 3a) functioning as a call to look around at the imagined
city. Thus as the previous psalm invited enactors to imagine themselves on the journey,
this psalm calls them to visualise their arrival in the city.

Entering into the world of the text, I found a sense of wonder came into my
voice when addressing Jerusalem with the line, “Our feet were standing in your gates”
(v. 2) as I imagined myself arriving at the longed-for destination. Enactors of these
psalms who already have emotional connections to the place named would no doubt
experience this with even greater intensity. The repetition of the city’s name (vv. 2, 3)
and in my performances the use of the resonant English term “city of peace,” further
evoke gladness as the descriptions of the city allow enactors to imagine the feeling of
arriving there. The recollection of the city’s role in the history of the people of God
evokes for members of the community of faith resonances with their own experiences of
meeting with YHWH and his people and the great delight this can be.

The name “Jerusalem,” ירושלים, elicits many different connotations, whether one
has visited the city or recalls her name from stories, hymns, or history. The descriptions
given in the text focus in turn on physical unity (v. 3b), spiritual pilgrimage (v. 4a),
physical community (v. 4b), and spiritual worship (v. 4c), drawing the imaginative
focus to the experience of the community gathered in the city in the presence of YHWH.
In my performances, I found myself inviting the audience into an experience of
gathered worship at this point. For communities of faith, the text can therefore resonate
with their current experience as they are gathered together in physical space for the
purposes of community and worship in the endeavour of enacting the collection. The
second half of the psalm (vv. 6–9) provides motivations and desires for the wellbeing of
the city and the gathered community it represents. It does so using a number of concrete
physical images “thrones,” “ramparts,” and “palaces,” (vv. 5, 7a, 7b). These assist enactors in imaginatively locating themselves in the city, as well as providing the city with a sense of stability and security.\textsuperscript{1038} In my performances I found that naming these physical objects associated with the city in its strength and majesty caused me to envisage the hopes expressed not as mere wishes, but as concrete expressions of a community living in a particular place under royal rule, thus associating it in my mind with experiencing the kingdom of God. It appears then, that the text has the effect of tapping into enactors’ understandings of their faith lived out as a physical reality in community and in relationship with YHWH.

The remainder of this psalm thus provides a foretaste of what is to be expected when the pilgrimage destination is reached. It is a place of community (v. 3a), unity (v. 3b), justice (v. 5a), and majesty (v. 5b) – attributes that are associated with YHWH’s character elsewhere in Psalter\textsuperscript{1039} – and therefore, as I found in my performances, provide a picture for enactors of a future fuller experience of knowing and enjoying all YHWH is. Enactors are then invited to seek the ongoing “peace,” שלום, and “tranquility,” שלום, of Jerusalem (v. 6), with the motivation for doing so explicitly given as the people and the dwelling place of YHWH (vv. 8–9). In my performances, I observed how these stand in for the audience/enacting community who are participating in the relational dynamics of the collection and thus the sense that blessing and abundance – all that is good – are to be found for the community in the place where YHWH is fully known.

The repeated use of “peace,” שלום, in the second half of this psalm confirms both the contrast with the isolation of Psalm 120 and the resonances with positive communal experiences, connecting the experience of unity in Jerusalem with

\textsuperscript{1038} See Gillmayr-Bucher, 490.
\textsuperscript{1039} For example, Pss 9:7; 33:5; 36:6; 89:14; 101:1; 103:6; 140:12; 147:19.
contentment and security. Similar emotional connotations are evoked by the ideas of “tranquility,” שלום, and “good,” טוב, found in the psalm (vv. 7, 9). There is a call to those listening and participating to pray for these experiences, with the words of blessing, “may there be,” יהא (v. 7), then spoken in response. In my performances, I experienced a yearning when expressing these desires. These then become not only descriptions of the enactors’ experience, but their expressed hope for one another. The cohortative entreaty, “let me” (vv. 8, 9), allows each individual to join in a mutual urging to seek and speak good for one another, engendering feelings of mutual cooperation and reciprocation. That this is explicitly done for the sake of the other members of the community reinforces the feelings of mutuality. When I attended to the repeated phrase “for the sake of,” לארשי (vv. 8, 9), I felt a depth of empathy evoked for those I was speaking to both as individuals (my brothers and sisters) and as a community (the house of YHWH). The psalm thus prompts speakers to view themselves in relation to one another, evoking compassion for one another as they speak peace and good upon one another.

This psalm presents the joy and hope of pilgrims’ arrival in Jerusalem, yet it is not the end of the collection nor the journey. The ongoing desire is that what can be experienced there might be for all in every situation.

### 6.7 Waypoint: Pausing

Without separating these three psalms too sharply from what follows, the end of Psalm 122 does present an appropriate place to pause in this pilgrimage through the collection. Together, they present the contours of the pilgrimage journey from far away (Ps 120), along the way (Ps 121), and at the destination (Ps 122). In light of the superscription, ideas of sojourning, walking, and arriving have particular impact. They present YHWH
as one who is in relationship with enactors, hearing and responding to their cries, overseeing and protecting them, and inviting them to meet with him in his house. There is movement within all three psalms, leaving the margins behind, taking each step forward, and entering into the city. The use of נְאָבָה in Psalm 120 as a description of the individual speaker finds fulfilment in a corporate experience in the place of נְאָבָה in Psalm 122. These three psalms thus take enactors emotionally from distress to joy, spatially from far to near, and relationally from isolation to community in YHWH's presence. As pilgrimage psalms, they invite those who enter into their experience to view their lives as a similar journey, seeking to draw ever nearer to the presence of YHWH and one another. As an introduction to the collection, they advocate for the benefits of pilgrimage as both a literal, historical endeavour and a metaphorical framework for the life of the community of faith in relationship with YHWH.
Chapter 7: The ongoing life of pilgrimage

7.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a theological interpretation of the middle nine psalms of the collection that is based on both careful analysis and translation of the text and insights gleaned from performance of that translation. Again, the three themes of anthropo-logic, cosmo-logic, and theo-logic are interwoven, with particular emphasis on the affective, kinaesthetic, and relational dimensions of the text.

7.2 Psalms 123–131: Living

The two most obvious groupings within the collection are the three introductory psalms (Pss 120–122) and the three concluding psalms (Pss 132–134). These middle nine psalms contain a variety of forms and focuses and are thus more difficult to group. Psalms 124 and 129 share a similar opening, 125 and 128 an ending, 125, 127 and 128 a wisdom flavour, and 126 and 129 an historical perspective. Together, these nine psalms form the bulk of the collection and demonstrate its variety and range. Although they are grouped together here predominantly for pragmatic purposes, they work together as the body of the collection in light of the shared superscription to connect the metaphor and experience of pilgrimage with the experiences of everyday life in families and communities. They take the idea of pilgrimage and connect it to the many different facets of living as the people of God.

\textsuperscript{1040} For example, Hossfeld and Zenger demarcate 125–129 as a group; Ventura has 123–129; Prinsloo puts 123–125, 126–128, and 129–131 together; Allen has 123–126 as a group and 127–128 as a pair.
7.3 Psalm 123: Looking

7.3.1 Text

This psalm is commonly named as a lament, whether individual or communal. The prayer is interrupted by the middle strophe, which speaks about YHWH rather than to YHWH. The shifts from “you” to “he” and back are accompanied by the shifting I/we perspective, showing possibilities for different voices to perform the psalm, or differences in posture and gesture by one speaker. The song is dominated by a double simile, which grounds the relationship of the people to YHWH in their daily experience of social roles, locating them as members of his household, which in light of the title might be a subtle allusion to the pilgrimage to his house. The repetition and parallelism used in so few verses provide intensification of the song’s emotive appeals and the open ending – with no anticipation or assurance of the cry being heard – works to place it as but one piece within a larger theological and liturgical framework.

The individual speaker in verse 1 gives way to a plural perspective with נני (v. 2), possibly indicating the role of a leader and responsive community. The basis for the request, תְּלַע (v. 2), is an appeal to the gracious character of YHWH. Verse 2 shifts from direct address to speech about YHWH, indicating a confession by the worshiping community. The imperative is repeated in verse 3, a cry that echoes the reason given immediately prior for the whole prayer. The vocative, יהוה (v. 3), returns the psalm to a direct cry. Both allow for a present participation in the request by those enacting the psalm.

1041 Gunkel and Begrich, 94, 123. See also Terrien, 818.
1042 Goldingay, 470; Kraus, Psalms 60–150, 436–37.
1043 See Hossfeld and Zenger, 349.
1044 Gerstenberger, Psalms: Part II, 330; Goldingay, 473, both suggest a leader speaking in verse 1 and the congregation responding in verse 2.
The reasons given for the cry are unexpected: the community’s contentment, שמחות (v. 3), with receiving mocking, מזמנים (vv. 3, 4), and scorn, לנים (v. 4), from their enemies. This experience of others speaking against the community has echoes from Psalm 120 and also points forwards toward the imagined scenario presented in the subsequent psalm.1047

7.3.2 Performance

Psalm 123 opens with a past recollection of looking to YHWH, which serves as a counterpoint to the questioning look to the mountains in Psalm 121. The question asked there was clearly answered: YHWH is the one to whom to look. Here, doing just that is recounted (v. 1), with the affective impact engendering confidence and even empowerment in the moment of trust and obedience. When performing the collection, I observed how making this recollection not to the audience but to YHWH as a prayer required a sincerity before God that deepened these feelings. The text thus encourages honest expressions of commitment to YHWH.

The lifting of the eyes is this time explicitly toward heaven (v. 1). Following on from the previous psalm in terms of spatiality, enactors are reminded that YHWH is the one who both dwells in their midst and is seated high above. After focusing on the city where YHWH dwells on earth in Psalm 122, this psalm then addresses YHWH as “the one dwelling in heaven,” הנני לעניהם (v. 1b), affirming the theological truth that he is both near and above all. The subsequent particle of mirativity, “Look!” מראה (v. 2), serves as a reminder that there is a dynamic conversation taking place between members of the community, inviting involvement. In performances, this became both an invitation to the audience and a reminder to myself of their presence and involvement.

1046 The two words are also used in parallel as synonyms in 2 Ki 19:21; Isa 37:22; Prov 30:17.
1047 See section 7.4.1 below.
The subsequent simile of servants looking to masters (v. 2) uses both social and spatial distance to emphasise YHWH’s transcendence. During my performances, I found the use of the body imagery, “eye,” יָמָן, and “hand,” יָד (v. 2), led me to imagine the favour requested being granted as a tangible gift passed from heaven to earth. The imagery of the psalm thus has the effect of connecting the heavenly and earthly realms, demonstrating that this is not a strict dualism but the two spaces are interconnected. The affective dimension of the simile is to place one in the shoes of those who are in a position of subservience, thereby evoking feelings of humility and leading to an emotional posture before YHWH of submission. There is also an expectancy and urgency to the imagery, emphasised by the repeated request for “favour,” נְשָׁכָה (v. 3). When attending to this in performances, I heard an insistent tone in my voice as the text prompted me to take on a disposition of beseeching YHWH. Likening themselves to servants, ניָדָם וּנְבָר (v. 2), enactors implicitly picture YHWH as their ultimate master and mistress, the one to whom they look for provision and blessing. The specific request in this psalm is for YHWH to display the gracious disposition, נִנְח (v. 3a), that is a fundamental aspect of his character, to the enacting community. In my performances, I attended to the way this request is developed and how there is no sense that YHWH has been withholding favour present in the psalm. Instead, the enacting community are invited to acknowledge that they have accepted and even been content with the non-favour that has come from other sources (vv. 3b, 4). YHWH is thus contrasted in the text with those who wish people harm and presented as the one who instead offers only favour and grace to those in relationship with him.

The psalm takes an unexpected emotional turn with the request for favour (v. 3a) bringing with it reminders of past experiences of “unfavour” (vv. 3b, 4). But rather than blaming YHWH for any such lack, the emotion of the conclusion is turned inward to the

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1048 See Gillmayr-Bucher, 496.
self and the community: we have been satisfied with the lack. The use of the word “satisfied,” פָּלַג, in relation to experiences of mocking and scorn (v. 4) is surprising and hearers of the psalm might well feel confused by it. Having the opportunity to prepare and repeatedly perform it, I was able to view it as an opportunity to reflect on my own contentment or complacency in undesirable circumstances. It therefore can provide motivation for change.

As enactors are invited to recall experiences of being the target of scorn or criticism from their enemies (vv. 3–4), the text produces an effect Prinsloo calls “the emotional experience of being in negative public (lived) space.”1049 In my performances, I found that the location of this expression after Psalm 122 emphasised the contrast between this recalled past experience (similar to that in Ps 120) and the joy found in the gathered community at the place of pilgrimage. The unfolding of the collection as a whole thus highlights the sense of movement from unprotected, threatening space to the joy and security found at the place of gathering as YHWH’s community in his presence.

The closing descriptions of those outside the community function as a way of cohering the pilgrims as a community by setting them in opposition to a common enemy. The synonymous word pairs, “mocking” and “scorn,” לְצָרֵךְ and חֲזָר, and “smug” and “proud,” נְטָעָה and נְתָנָא, in verse 4 suggest enemies who take pleasure in their wickedness, further setting them apart from the community that has found only distress and isolation in any hint of such otherness. In my performances, I identified feelings of dislike and derision generated by speaking these words, suggesting that though the psalm does not explicitly resolve, its effect is to encourage enactors to be discontent with the situation described and therefore seek an alternative. The psalm thus begins and ends with looking for more, anticipating what is still to come within the collection.

7.4 Psalm 124: Escaping

7.4.1 Text

This psalm functions as an imaginative and emotive invitation to praise YHWH for his deliverance. Combining two sets of powerful life-and-death images with both anadiplosis and word-for-word repetition, it explores and emphasises themes of deliverance, protection, and thanksgiving. Its consistent use of the first person plural indicates its appropriateness for congregational use, as the community is invited to speak to one another as they are together caught up in thanksgiving for past deliverance and confession of ongoing need for YHWH.

The opening word נָא יְהֹוָה (v. 1) lays the foundation for a song that uses negative images to present an expression of confidence. יְהֹוָה יִשָּׁחֵט (v. 1) is a performative exhortation, likely from an individual reader/enactor to the community, to participate in the declaration of this song.1050 Israel is therefore used as an appellation for the gathered worshiping community. The repetition in verse 2 indicates an affirmative response to the invitation, with added dramatic effect.

Rather than naming a specific national threat, יִשָּׁחֵט (v. 2) allows for later enactors of the song to relate it to any number of historical events or persons. The imagery of engulfing waters, יִשָּׁחֵט כִּפְרוֹת (v. 4), is found in both literal (Jonah 2:4–6)1051 and metaphorical usage (Ps 69:3, 16) and calls to mind the idea of chaos generally associated with water and flooding.1052 The vocabulary of verses 4 and 5 is identical, with only the addition of the preposition הִלּוֹת (v. 5) developing the intensity of the imagery.

1050 See Alter, 443; Gerstenberger, Psalms: Part II, 333; Schaefer, 303. See also Ps 129:1.
1051 This is not a comment on whether the events described in the book of Jonah are literal, but rather that in the context of the story of Jonah, this refers to the waters of the sea.
1052 See HALOT, 1475; Gerstenberger, Psalms: Part II, 334. Prinsloo, “Historical Reality,” 181, 202, argues that the well known Ancient Near Eastern motifs of water and chaos suggest that the historical reality of the post-exilic community is being described as an “anti-creation.”
After such strong imagery, the blessing formula, בֹּרָדוֹ הַזָּהָב (v. 6), serves to draw the enactor back to the reality that these events have not happened. 1053 As well as providing further graphic imagery, “prey for their teeth,” מַחֲרָךְ לָשְׁנָיוֹת (v. 6), points forward to the metaphor underlying the next strophe. The generic term כֹּה (v. 7) appears to evoke the animal to be hunted, killed, and eaten. The metaphor is used for war scenarios both within the biblical text 1054 and in ANE literature. 1055 The non-verbal clause shifts the emphasis from what could have happened to what that means for how the community continues to understand its experience and identity. נֶדֶר (v. 8) is used in the collection only here and in Psalm 121, drawing the enactor of the collection as a whole back to the question asked and answered there. “The name of YHWH,” נֶדֶר הַזָּהָב (v. 8), is used throughout the Psalms as a spoken designation used by worshipers, 1056 suggesting this is a liturgical confession of the community. The concluding formula, כֻּלָּהו כֹּה בָּאָרָךְ (v. 8), is also found in 121:2 and 134:3, with the participle invoking YHWH’s ongoing creative activity 1057 and concluding this song with the community’s declaration for the present.

7.4.2 Performance

The title “of David,” לָשְׁנָיוֹת, allows Psalm 124 to be read with the historical figure in view, calling to mind situations in which someone rose against him (e.g. Saul, Abimelech) and possibly drawing parallels for individual pilgrims who have also experienced personal persecution. It could also be that David as the leader of the nation is imagined and the plural pronouns in the imagery provide an added sense of

1053 G. Wehmeier, “לָשְׁנָיוֹת,” TLOT, 1:281, notes the function of the phrase as “turning lament to praise,” however, here the scenario has not been real but an elaborate “what if” scenario, thus there is no actual lament.
1054 For example, Ezek 19.
1055 Notably, by Sennacherib, see note in section 3.7.2 above.
1057 See Hossfeld and Zenger, 358.
persecution as a community. I observed in my performances that the repeated “our” and “us” phrases throughout each verse of the psalm caused me to feel as though I was speaking on behalf of the audience, feeling the possibility of shared jeopardy and a sense of camaraderie. Thus the emotions provoked by the imagined scenario include the feeling of solidarity as well as fear.

Psalm 124 uses vivid imagery such as “swallowed,” תesium, and “engulfed,” לועה, to describe a situation of opposition, likely to generate emotions of fear, panic, and anger. But the imagery is prefaced by an introduction clarifying that the scenario is imaginary; it is what would have occurred but for YHWH’s favour (vv. 1–2). The repeated phrase “if not for YHWH,” לאליה יהוה, coupled with the explicit invitation to Israel to join in speaking it (v.1), functioned in my performances to elicit a feeling of gratitude and a desire for the audience to feel grateful, even before the explanation for such a disposition was provided. Thus the panic provoked by the imagery is framed within the context of joy and praise. The community is therefore experiencing various emotions simultaneously, allowing them to draw a strong contrast between what is (with YHWH) and what would be (without YHWH). In repeating this declaration that YHWH has been “for,” ב (vv. 1, 2), his people, I found myself picturing a warrior standing alongside to fight the enemy. The text thus has the effect of providing another spatial dimension to YHWH’s presence, he is above, in their midst, and at their side.

Relationally, the psalm essentially invites enactors to imagine what it would mean for them not to be in relationship with YHWH. The result of this unimaginable scenario is destruction and despair (vv. 3–5). YHWH then receives praise for what he has not done (v. 6), or for not allowing what would have happened had he not been in relationship with his people. This imagined hostile world of the enemy without YHWH’s intervention is likened to a trapper’s snare, יער פרת (v. 7b). What YHWH has
essentially done, therefore, is rescue his people from what could have been. In my performances, I was struck by how powerfully this image speaks of salvation without explicitly describing YHWH’s involvement. A bird inside a trap is utterly helpless and can do nothing without outside intervention. The image in the text is thus one that necessarily implies a saviour.

The second half of the psalm (v. 6) turns to praise explicitly, calling on the community to worship YHWH their rescuer and feel gratefulness and joy. The simile of the escaped bird (v. 7) engenders emotions associated with liberation, such as exhilaration. I experienced a palpable sense of relief and lightness in my performance during this image. The psalm ends on an explicit note of praise to YHWH (v. 8), connecting the experience of rescue to his help and thereby linking the feeling of gratitude for the removal of the possibility of fear and distress in enactors to praise.

Kinaesthetically, much of the psalm’s imagery depicts movement including the enemy rising up (v. 2b), imagining the possibility of sinking down (vv. 4–5), and the end result likened to a bird flying free from a trap (v. 7). I found these images led me to think carefully about the use of the performance space in order to imagine the potential and actual scenarios recounted in a way that would connect with the audience. More than mere statements of deliverance, the imagery and movement provide enactors with an imaginative experience of having been delivered from a life-threatening situation. As the text engages the imagination, it has the effect of placing us within the scenario, leading us to own the story as our own history and connect it to our own life experience. The metaphorical pilgrimage the collection is taking us on is thereby one from death to life.\textsuperscript{1058}

The concluding line of the psalm picks up on two descriptions of YHWH from Psalm 121, “help,” נָבַל, and “maker of heaven and earth,” נּוֹבַל שֵׁם הָאָרֶץ (v. 8). In my

\textsuperscript{1058} See Prinsloo, “The Role of Space,” 466.
performances, I noted how this repetition had the effect of bringing to my mind all the feelings of care and protection present when enacting the earlier psalm and reapplying them in this new scenario. This echo of an earlier part of the collection has the effect of drawing together the disparate relational images of YHWH as guardian and saviour, with the repeated reference to his creating power providing confidence that he has the power, as well as the desire, to relate to the people in these ways.

This psalm adds to the collection the dynamic of escaping, being rescued and set free. This is the experience of the community as a whole and forms a significant foundation for the life of the pilgrim.

7.5 Psalm 125: Trusting

7.5.1 Text

This psalm is typically classified as a communal song of trust or lament, but it contains no direct expression of dependence. Its original unity has been questioned, but in its final form within the canon it contains numerous interplays between wisdom-type sayings and cries of the heart, between geographical and personal images, and between descriptors of the righteous and the wicked, suggesting a range of expression in tone and gesture. It contains less direct repetition and anadiplosis than other psalms within the collection, preferring to use synonyms in wordplay and some instances of parallelism. There are no first person forms, though there are direct addresses to YHWH, Israel, and Jerusalem, indicating the potential for multiple voices to enact the psalm. The numerous descriptors used for the community of faith appear aspirational and though the Zion imagery is more geographical than theological, read in light of the

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1059 Gunkel, 548, “Volksklagelieder.”
collection’s shared title, it evokes connections to pilgrimage as both practice and metaphor.

Unlike the previous psalms, this poem begins with a third person statement about the community. The plural participle [וּלְבָנָהוֹ] (v. 1) is more frequently used for those who rely on rulers or riches, but here functions as a wisdom saying about the nation or community who instead trusts solely in YHWH, suggesting a tonal shift from expressing emotion to passing on advice. Whether the geophysical location or the theological significance of Mt Zion (v. 1) is in view, the simile invokes the mountain as an image for the people, rather than for YHWH’s reign; their trust in YHWH provides stability in their lives. The double explanation of the simile in verse 1 uses vocabulary previously found in the collection, [תַּחַת] (Ps 121:3) and [שָׁם] (Pss 120:5; 122:5; 123:1), but here applies these descriptions directly to the mountain and only secondarily to the people. The image is one of security in both space and time.

The city’s name is placed emphatically in verse 2, shifting the tone from the previous wisdom-like saying to a more emotive declaration. This effect is also achieved by articulating the image before the referent. Although this image has usually been understood positively, the surrounding mountains can be understood as a military disadvantage, giving the image a possible negative connotation as in Ps 121:1. (v. 2) would then affirm YHWH’s protection despite Jerusalem’s vulnerability. The link back to Psalm 121 is affirmed by the repetition of the formula (v. 2) – also in Ps 131:3 – and in the context of the collection this serves to bind this psalm thematically and theologically with Psalms 121 and 131 and their focus on Israel finding hope and strength in YHWH.

1061 See, for example, Goldingay, 485; Schaefer, 304; Gerstenberger, Psalms: Part II, 337.
1062 Segal, 603.
1063 Ibid., 604.
Although at first glance verse 3 might seem an abrupt shift from the previous, the semantic contrast is between בָּרִיךְ וּבָּרוּךְ,֑וּ and בָּיָהָ וּבָּיוָהָ that is, what will and will not remain. בָּרִיךְ (v. 3) is a frequent descriptor for the worshiping community in the Psalter, although it appears only in this verse with the article. This is the only use of the term for the people in the collection, suggesting it is their contrast to the wicked above that is in view rather than other aspects of their character. The reason given is not, as might be expected, to restrain the wicked but to restrain the righteous. The danger is the corrupting influence upon the community of faith. The body imagery, בָּרִיךְ ... בָּרוּךְ (v. 3), grounds the picture in the practice of the people, whether in reference to retaliation or corrupt worship, and provides an obvious example of the way gesture could be used to convey depth of expression.

The direction of discourse shifts with the deferential imperative בָּרִיךְ וּבָּרוּךְ (v. 4) marking a direct appeal to YHWH. The consequences of two different paths in life are contrasted – here that of the good, בָּרִיךְ (v. 4), and the iniquitous, בַּאֲרָאָה (v. 5) – a notion found elsewhere in the Psalter and particularly in wisdom literature. The concluding benediction, בָּרִיךְ ... בָּרוּךְ (v. 5), adds a performative dimension, conceivably spoken by a priest, summarising the requests in the poem with בָּרִיךְ and naming Israel as the righteous community previously described by various adjectives. It also links this psalm to others in the collection by use of the word בָּרִיךְ.

1064 The words are used as a pair, for example, in Deut 12:10, 2 Sam 7:1, Jer 27:11.
1065 For example, Pss 32:11; 33:1; 68:4; 97:12; 118:15; 140:14.
1066 The word also appears in Ps 129:4 as a description of YHWH.
1067 Stretching out the hand is used for violence in Ps 55:21, for example.
1068 This could be the case if the background of foreign rulers leading Israel to apostasy is in view.
1069 See, for example, Pss 1:6; 7:9 15:2–4; 37:16; Prov 10:16; 11:8; 12:7; 13:5;
1070 Also found in Psalms 120, 122, 128.
7.5.2 Performance

The first statement by the community in enacting Psalm 125 is a declaration about that community itself: the fact that they are the ones trusting YHWH (v. 1), evidenced by their participation in and use of the collection, means that they are likening themselves to the firmly-founded Mt Zion. This produces the emotional response of satisfaction and assurance. The collection affirms the very act they are participating in and encourages them to continue. In my performances, I noted that speaking these words to the audience became an act of affirming and encouraging them. This is sustained further by the declaration of YHWH surrounding and protecting his people (v. 2), with the unending nature of this protection allowing the community to feel relaxed and unthreatened, leading full circle back to continued trust in YHWH. This is explicated in the following image, declaring overtly that the “wicked,” פִּזְצַּר (others), will not oppress the “righteous,” יְזֵירָה (the community).

The psalm begins with a geographical allusion, but unlike Psalm 122, here the references to Jerusalem are primarily about its geophysical location rather than the community gathered there (vv. 1, 2). Likening the community to a mountain provides a picture of stability and peace and this is what some audience members indicated they pictured during my performances. For others, these connotations are multiplied because this is not just any mountain. The naming of Mount Zion provides intertextual resonances for communities familiar with its history and the prophecies made about it. Enactors are invited to bring together imaginatively all it represents – past and future

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1071 My understanding of the translation was that the image of Jerusalem surrounded by mountains is negative (see comments on this verse in section 3.8.2 above), however in my performances I recognised that the image appeared to be experienced by audiences as a positive, comforting one. Thus performance acted as a test of my interpretation. Whether the image is positive or negative and thus the simile is synonymous or contrastive, however, the emotional effect of the simile itself is the same.

1072 For example, R9: “the mountains – places of beauty and peace.”

– so that the effect of the text is a sense of security found not only in the physical solidity of the mountain but in their faith in the words spoken about it by their God. The second image, being surrounded by mountains (v. 2), might have different imaginative connotations. My observations were that audience members at my performances perceived this as a positive image, possibly because they have little experience with national threats or simply because the previous image was a positive one. As I performed this aware of the possible negative connotations of the imagery, I found myself transported in my imagination to my own experience of standing in the Kidron Valley looking up at the mountains around. Thus my own experience of the place and its more recent history enriched my experience. This is the imaginative effect of the text naming topographic realities, to connect with the real life experience of enactors in all its potential diversity and complexity and thus to allow for a range of meanings to be experienced by different communities.

The attributes and actions of YHWH described in the previous psalms provide a basis for those placing their trust in him to be confident and secure, as unshaken as Mount Zion (v. 1). The imagery of his protecting presence is given yet another dimension with the picture of YHWH surrounding his people “forever,” יְהֹוָּה (v. 2). In my performances, I observed how this image of security led to a feeling of contentment, which most naturally evokes the idea of protection from enemies. The text takes enactors in a different direction: it is protection from their own potential to act unjustly that is named in verse 3. It appears that there is more going on than a “simplistic” blessing for doing good and corresponding punishment for doing evil. Those who are righteous, good, and upright are defined not primarily by their actions or intentions, but as the people of God, those earlier described as trusting in YHWH. It is their relational status that determines which group they are in. Certainly in my performances, I
observed how the descriptors of different groups of people in this psalm were understood to refer to the community and those outside the community respectively. The psalm as a whole, particularly in light of the collection as a whole, thus connects morality to relationship, a common theme throughout the Scriptures. Being in relationship with YHWH results in being like him and behaving according to his ways.

Due to the unexpected nature of the second consequence, namely that the righteous will not stretch out their hands (v. 3b), my sense was that the audience of a single performance did not have the time to comprehend or engage with this imagery fully and therefore it may have had little affective impact. As the performer who had entered into the text, my own understanding of it provided an additional dimension to the sense of security evoked: YHWH’s people will not fall into injustice themselves but will be kept righteous. There is then a freedom from fear or guilt implied by this affirmation.

The second half of the psalm uses bodily images to contrast the wicked and the righteous (vv. 3–5). The community is invited to see themselves as the “upright in heart,” מְנוֹלֶחָם (v. 4b). In my performances, I observed an unplanned straightening of my posture at this point. The use of the bodily imagery thus can cause enactors to imagine themselves with a certain disposition to life that is then applied metaphorically to the state of their heart. In contrast to this straightening, the wicked are those who turn to “crookedness,” מַקְלוֹלָם (v. 5a). The use of these two contrasting words thus has the effect of enabling enactors to imagine these physical statures and thereby subconsciously affirm their symbolically associated moral qualities. The righteous are also kept from stretching out their hands in injustice (v. 3b). In my performances as I spoke these words and simultaneously started and then stopped the corresponding action, I pictured myself tempted to grasp that which is unjust but being protected from
my own evil desire. It appears the text can thus have the effect of portraying an
imagined scenario that is morally objectionable and affirming the choice to live another
way. That the wicked are caused to be “led away,” יִלָּא (v. 5b), by YHWH presents yet
another spatial image that can influence enactors at an imaginative, rather than purely
propositional, level. In my performances, I pictured such people being taken offstage,
leaving the performance space and thereby leaving the gathered enacting community.
The text can affirm the dichotomy of us and them, represented spatially by two different
directional paths.

This psalm includes yet another contrast between the wicked and the righteous:
the community pleads with YHWH to do good to the “good” and “upright,” יִנְן וְשֵׁב (v. 4)1074 – which again is understood to refer to themselves – but to lead away those
who are “crooked” or “iniquitous,” יִנְן לְלִבְדָּר or יֵלְקָנָה (v. 5). Although the focus of the
collection is on those in relationship with YHWH, the concluding verse of this psalm
presents a slightly more complex picture of those outside the community of faith. They
are described as those who turn to that which is not straight, יִנְן לְלִבְדָּר (v. 5a), implying a
choice to walk a different path to the community of faith. In response, YHWH leads
them away (v. 5b). It could therefore be suggested that YHWH is relationally responsive
to them as well, leading them down the path of their own choosing. For the pilgrimage
community, the blessing and joy experienced by YHWH’s favour is thus contrasted with
being taken away, away from both the community and from YHWH. In my
performances, the use of gestures and space meant that those led away were
imaginatively “led” off stage – out of the view and perspective of the audience – and
thereby dismissed. This means they are no longer a threat to the community that
remains. The resultant security felt is affirmed by the concluding line, “Peace by upon
Israel,” יִנְן וְלֶב יְשֵׁר אֶל (v. 5b), which speaks peace and wholeness upon those gathered.

1074 The emotive impact is intensified by the use of the word “heart.” See Janowski, 159.
In my performances, by speaking these words as a pronounced benediction, I sought to elicit feelings of contentment and fulfilment in the community, as appeared to me was their intended effect. The psalm thus affirms the choice of the pilgrimage community to place their trust in YHWH in the past, now, and as they continue their journey.

7.6 Psalm 126: Turning

7.6.1 Text

This psalm has been categorised as both communal lament and communal thanksgiving. These divergent views are at least partially due to the difficulty in understanding the use of tenses throughout the poem. Those who set verses 1–3 in the past often see the restoration from exile as specifically in view. Although possible, the psalmist has avoided explicitly embedding this historical event within the poem, allowing it to be re-interpreted by successive enacting communities more generally. The focus is therefore on the current cry for YHWH’s intervention, which is based on the experience of his having done so in the past as well as the imagined experience of what that would entail in the present. This imagined experience is grounded with the use of concrete metaphors related to the real world experience of the community, both geographical and agricultural. The similarities between verses 3–4 and Joel 2:20–21 have led to suggestions of textual dependency and at the least indicate the appropriateness of the ideas expressed here for the community’s eschatological hope. The shifts from speech about YHWH (vv. 1–3) to a cry to YHWH (v. 4) to a more sapiential saying (vv. 5–6) indicate differences in who is being addressed throughout the

1075 The former, for example, by Gunkel, 551; Allen, 229; the latter, for example, by Gerstenberger, Psalms: Part II, 342.
1076 See, for example, Hossfeld and Zenger, 371–72; Deurloo.
1077 Beyerlin, We Are Like Dreamers, proposes that the psalm quotes Joel; Hossfeld and Zenger that Joel quotes the psalm.
psalm. Whether it contains a specific glance backwards to the return from exile or not, the forward-looking dimension of the cry for restoration is appropriate for the pilgrimage setting as the community looks for YHWH’s intervention in their own situation.

Whether referring to a specific moment in history or more broadly interpreted, the focus of the psalm’s opening reference, בָּשַׁם יְהוָה (v. 1), is on the experience of the people that occurs in conjunction with such activity. The biblical usage of the word הַיָּד (v. 1) refers primarily to seeing visions of the future; thus the speakers of this psalm compare themselves to seers, denoting the joy and vindication they could imagine a dreamer experiencing once their dream comes to pass. The direct reiteration of the phrase indicates that the imagined words of the nations, הָדוּר הָיְד (v. 2), are taken up by the community of faith in verse 3 and repeated as their own liturgical confession.

The direction of discourse changes in verse 4 with the enacting community now picking up the remembered scenario from verse 1 and making it their present cry. From a second person plea, the psalm then shifts to a third person, possibly proverbial, saying: הָדוֹר הַיְדֵם הָרַגְנוּ הָרַגָּה יְהוָה (v. 5). An indirect image is used, implicitly likening the experience of the nation’s fortunes to the experience of the individual farmer. The structure is chiastic and the vocabulary picks up the anticipated shout of joy from verse 2. The image is then personalised (v. 6) by the shift to a singular sower. The agricultural imagery reflects every day rural life, meaning that the cry for YHWH’s

1078 In Ps 114:1, this grammatical construction is used to refer to the Exodus event, however, it is more commonly used throughout the Psalter to refer to indefinite events, including with the same verb, בָּשַׁם, in Pss 9:4, 14:7; 53:7.
1079 See Gen 37:5, 10; 40:5, 8; 41:5, 11, 15; 42:9; Deut 13:2, 4, 6; Judg 7:13; Joel 3:1; Dan 2:1, 3. See also Marrs, “The Syr-Hm ’Iw,” 82.
1081 Zakovitch, 164, proposes the possibility that there is a sound-play between רָגָה (“sow”) and רָגָּה (“scatter”) with YHWH the one who has scattered his people in tears.
intervention in the life of the nation is understood to be worked out in a daily
demonstration of his power and faithfulness.

7.6.2 Performance

Psalm 126 begins by recounting a past experience of the community. Later enactors are put in the position of the first person plural speakers of the psalm (v. 1), so that the history of their faith community is emotionally appropriated as their own. As a performer of the collection, I experienced this appropriation, but I also felt that I was representing this past community to my audiences and thus they might not have felt included in the corporate “we.” This leads to a sense of excitement and surprise, with the simile, “like ones dreaming,” expressing the idea of hopes fulfilled and come to fruition. In my performances, I recognised that the naming of my mouth and tongue (v. 2) while using my mouth and tongue to enact these psalms naturally led me likewise to adopting the actions of laughter and joyous exclamation. These physical actions are associated with the feeling of joy and thereby drew me in to the emotional experience of jubilation through the idea of “emotional contagion” noted above.

The psalm recounts a moment of turning (v. 1a), which I physically replicated in performance while walking across the stage. In doing so, I noticed that the physical action caused me to consider the idea of seeing from a new perspective. By imagining themselves changing direction, enactors of this text experience the associated ideas of reversal, redirection, and even repentance that such an action brings. This prepares them to experience the whole psalm, which reaffirms similar ideas of a change in situation and the juxtaposition of blessing and cursing. The pairing of movement in opposite directions, with directional phrases, “going out,” (v. 6a) and “coming back,” (v. 7b)

1082 This highlighted the limitations of having a single performer before an audience, rather than the whole community enacting these texts.
(v. 6b), similarly to Psalm 121, causes enactors to imagine walking or journeying, whether on a literal pilgrimage or metaphorically making their way through life. The psalm also refers directly to enactors’ “mouth” and “tongue,” יָדָה (v. 2), as well as implicitly to their ears, eyes, and voice through the images of hearing (v. 3), crying (v. 5a), and shouting (v. 5b). In my performances, each of these spoken connections with my physical body became an important part of my gestures and movement. By linking the changes in direction and location with the individual’s body, the text calls enactors to experience the sense of movement and re-direction within themselves and this metaphor can thereby be internalised for a re-directed life, from one that is “off-centre” to one that is “at-centre,” or in more common parlance, “centred.”

The focus on the community in relationship with YHWH is at the forefront of Psalm 126, with the historical experience of his people recounted (v. 1). YHWH is again presented as responsible for their salvation and rescue, using imagery that could be taken by communities throughout history to refer to various events within the memories of their forebears or their own lives: the exodus, rescue from enemies, the return from exile, even redemption in Jesus for Christian interpreters. These words can be applied to any of YHWH’s great acts in bringing about a change in status for his people. In my performances, I noted how YHWH is pictured as the bringer of “laughter” and “joy,” שמח and חג, to his people (v. 2a), with the text having the effect of eliciting an emotional response for enactors due to their relationship with YHWH. The text provides a further significant reason for such rejoicing. Not only has the community experienced joy, but YHWH’s reputation has been enhanced among the nations (v. 2b). In one of my performances, I particularly noted how the wording of the nations’ declaration brought

1083 The terms that Prinsloo, “The Role of Space,” 467–68, uses for the effect of this psalm.
1084 Ventura, 382, provides an important reminder that this is not purely spiritual but can include “epoderamiento” económico, político y religioso, así como la restauración del estatus civil” (“empowerment” – economic, political and religious, as well as the restoration of civil status”).
together admiration for YHWH with a sense of contempt for his people and thereby enhanced the sense of wonder present in the pronouncement. The text thus allows one a glimpse of the magnitude of what is being stated about them by providing a hint of the “absurdity” that the creator of all that is would step in and rescue them.

The unexpected recounting of a statement of praise on the lips of outsiders (v. 2b) elicits feelings of surprise and wonder, which then transforms into joyous worship when the repetition of the declaration (v. 3) is spoken as the words of the enacting community itself. I attended to the way the repetition of the phrase imagined on the lips of two different groups thus elicits an emotional intensification. Having imagined themselves as part of those who experienced YHWH’s great favour in the past, the psalm now puts on enactors’ lips their own entreaty, that they may experience these emotions not only in their imagination, but in their quotidian experience.

The remainder of this psalm is a prayer for YHWH to continue to bring about reversal in the lives of the enacting community (vv. 4–6). When performing this text, I was drawn to the confidence found in the descriptions of reversal and the way this flows from the recounting of the historical experience of being in relationship with YHWH. YHWH is both the one who has brought about change in the lives of the community and the one who can be trusted to do so again. The text implicitly calls enactors to rely on the consistency and faithfulness of YHWH; what he has done he will continue to do.

The image of rivers in the desert (v. 4) is one of unexpected abundance and refreshing, forming the basis of a plea to YHWH. I observed how the inclusion of this image in the entreaty turned my focus from the request itself to the expected answer and its associated feelings of flooding joy.1085 Thus by inviting enactors to make this request,

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the text has the effect of generating feelings of hopefulness and optimism, speaking of
the possibilities that can be experienced even if they are in the least likely place.

The subsequent agricultural imagery (vv. 5, 6) further highlights the theme of
reversal, with sorrow turning to delight as “sowing,” الزعم, becomes “reaping,” קין.
Again the explicit naming of physical actions connected to emotion (weeping
and shouting) evokes such feelings in those who hear and speak of them. The whole psalm
is thereby an experience of an emotional redirection, connecting the journey of life with
YHWH with movement from disorientation to orientation, to use Brueggemann’s terms.
Pilgrimage involves turning and it is here shown that this is not merely a once for all
departure, but an experience that can be renewed and experienced throughout the
pilgrimage of life.

7.7 Waypoint: Pausing

The end of Psalm 126 provides another apposite place to pause in this pilgrimage
through the collection due to these four psalms’ shared focus on the collective
relationship of the community to YHWH. They explore the community’s experiences of
complacency (Ps 123) and trust (Ps 125), as well as deliverance from both imagined (Ps
124) and historical (Ps 126) distress. Three of the four psalms contain an explicit prayer
for intervention: for mercy (Ps 123:3), favour (Ps 125:4), and renewal (Ps 126:4). Each
psalm includes a reference to those outside the community as “other,” thereby affirming
the solidarity and identity of the pilgrim community.

A range of imagery has been employed, with enactors viewing themselves as
dependent slaves (Ps 123), escaped birds (Ps 124), protected locations (Ps 125), and
blessed harvesters (Ps 126), but with each highlighting the fundamental place of YHWH
in the corporate life of the community. Despite the emotional lows of remembered
complacency (Ps 123:3b–4) or imagined distress (Ps 124:3–5), the primary emotional experience of these four psalms is of shared joy and confidence. They therefore invite those who participate in their use to find their identity in that same community experience, choosing to be part of those who look to, trust in, and seek YHWH. They continue the forward movement of the collection, recognising the past but focusing on the present and future experience of corporate relationship with YHWH as his people.

7.8 Psalm 127: Building

7.8.1 Text

Psalm 127 has often been considered to consist of two independent fragments, but the themes of home and city found in both parts of the poem support its unity. A Sumerian hymn to the goddess Nisaba similarly links domestic and military imagery. The psalm’s sapiential or wisdom tone is often commented upon but the shift from third to second person speech indicates a stronger performative dimension than pure wisdom literature. The wisdom elements, building, and the name “beloved” provide links to Solomon, with the superscription’s attribution indicating he is the psalm’s key “interpretive figure.” There is possible paronomasia between the וּבָּבֶ (v. 1) and the וּבֶ (v. 3), as well as alliteration using the letter ב throughout. Standing at the centre of the collection and read in light of the shared superscription, further allusions to Jerusalem and the temple can be surmised.

1088 See Gunkel, 553–56; Terrien, 829–30; Gerstenberger, Psalms: Part II, 346–47; Stocks, 126.
1089 Hossfeld and Zenger, 394.
The phrase יבנה ביה (v. 1) evokes the regular human activity of house building, but in light of the Solomonic superscription, the link with the divine name provides a probable allusion to the temple as well. In light of the superscription, it is particularly appropriate for pilgrims travelling from their homes to the temple city to have both in mind, with the link between their starting point and their destination being that YHWH’s presence needs to be acknowledged in both. After the home and the city, the third description of futility, בה (v. 2a), summarises the result of the long day described in the labours of building in either place. עב (v. 2b) is used in Gen 3:16 and here evokes the frustration of human toil.

The particle of mirativity, וה (v. 3), marks a turning point in the psalm, from futility to fruitfulness. The metaphor of fruit, יד (v. 3), for fertility echoes the blessings of Deut 28. The simile of arrows in a warrior’s hand, יד ביד (v. 4), contrasts with the comparable image in Psalm 120 describing punishment. In this context, the arrows are usually viewed as defensive weapons, referring to the security provided by their possession, yet it is possible the image also includes ideas of offense. The referent of the image, יד (v. 4), is explanatory, clarifying that an old man needs the security that comes from able children, born in his youth, who can protect and defend him. The role of the interjection ℣ (v. 5) rather than the

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1091 See DCH, 338; Schaefer, 307. LXX uses ὀδύνη (“sorrow”), which evokes the suffering of Israel in Egypt (Exod 3:7).
1092 Ventura, 378 sees the second half of the psalm as a critique of the first, with a shift from an economic system where land is a heritage and production is the key value, to one where family and people are valued.
1094 In this original context, the gendered term “sons” would be appropriate for the imagery of warfare and security; however in a contemporary setting, daughters can also perform these functions, therefore for contemporary audiences the gender-neutral term is used.
1095 This notion is also found in a fragment of Akkadian wisdom: “A late heir – losses!, hardship!” Šimâ Milkâ 54, in Yoram Cohen, Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 89.
verb כָּפַר is understood as bringing the focus to the public status of the person spoken about and is a word that in itself brings honour to those of whom it is used.1096

Surprisingly then, it is not the honoured one who will not experience shame, כָּפַר (v. 5), but his children. This should also be understood as a social, rather than emotional, status,1097 and confirms the honour spoken above to the father, as his good reputation now extends to the subsequent generation.

7.8.2 Performance

At the mid point of the collection, Psalm 127 starts with an attribution connecting it to Solomon, לְשֵׁנִיָּהוּ, evoking subconscious feelings associated with wisdom and blessing for the community familiar with his story even before any other words are spoken. The repeated word “futility,” אֱלֹהִים (vv. 1a, 1b, 2), is reminiscent of Ecclesiastes1098 (which is also connected to Solomon) prompting similar feelings of hopelessness and ineffectuality. This is qualified by the “if,” כָּפַר, introducing each of the first two lines. These emotions are conditional and situational and it is only if the community neglects to seek YHWH’s involvement in their endeavours that such feelings will become their reality. The psalm thus enables enactors to feel a brief moment of hopelessness in order that they may choose the option that does not lead to this emotion in their daily lives. The third use of the word “futility,” אֱלֹהִים (v. 2a), is different. Lacking the conditional “if,” כָּפַר, the shift to the second person means these words are spoken directly to, as well as by, the community. In my performances I observed how this shift focused the emotional impact as I confronted the audience with a subtle accusation. Are they rising early, dwelling late, or eating the bread of pain? I detected a sorrowfulness engendered as

1096 See note on Ps 127:5 in section 3.10.2 above.
1098 Although a different word, כָּפַר, is used in Ecclesiastes.
these words were spoken, particularly that members of the community might not know that their actions could be considered futile.\textsuperscript{1099}

The psalm carries forward the relational involvement of \textit{YHWH} in his people’s everyday lives. As in Psalm 124, situations are imagined where \textit{YHWH} is not present and active, but the focus there is on salvation from enemies, whereas here it is on the tasks of daily existence, “building” and “guarding,” בנה and \textit{בנה} (v. 1). \textit{YHWH} is thus presented as the one who is essential in the community’s lives at the extremes and in the mundane. In my performances, I noticed another dichotomy present in the relational imagery at this point: the text presents a scenario where \textit{YHWH} is to be the builder of houses and guardian of cities and yet the activity of the human builders and guardians remains essential to imagining the text. \textit{YHWH} is thus presented not as the one who works \textit{instead} of his people, but who works with and through his people, inviting them to participate cooperatively with him in the tasks of life.

With its wisdom flavour and references to work and family, this psalm does not have the same sense of movement as many others in the collection. In the context of pilgrimage, it appears to refer to life at home. I performed it standing fairly still, toward the front centre of the stage, to convey its sense of speaking into settled life. Nevertheless, there is movement and physicality conveyed in the actions of building and guarding (v. 1), as well as rising and delaying to dwell (v. 2). During my performances, I attended to the way that this psalm appears to “zoom in” from the wider perspective of a journey through life to the everyday activities of living. Enactors can connect the imagery with their own life experiences – the mundane and routine – and thereby consider how these too are part of their pilgrimage.

\textsuperscript{1099} In different cultural contexts, this might evoke further emotions. For example, Ventura, 367, interprets these references to work and food as the fight for the right to rest and be freed from oppressive working conditions and thus sees defiance evoked here.
The transition to the line “thus he gives,” ִּתְנִּיא (v. 2d), is awkward but I experienced the emotional impact to be tempering. The unexpected introduction of ideas of “give” and “sleep,” ִתְנִּיא and ִתְנִּיא, along with the pronouncement of their status as beloved (v. 2d), softened the blow of the accusation, allowing any emotional hackles raised to relax as feelings of restfulness and esteem are evoked. Whether the subsequent lines (vv. 3–5) are directly related to this image or not, the descriptions they use remind community members of their own children, engendering happiness at this provision from YHWH and also possibly confidence at having the security and status children provide. The naming of an adverse social emotion, shame, with a negator, has the effect of evoking the opposite emotion, thus leading to feelings of unashamedness or honour. It is probable, however, that some members of the community are childless. In my performances, I was conscious of those present to whom these words could not be directly spoken. They might feel the same emotions as members of the wider community, particularly if a corporate perspective is taken, but they could also experience emotions seemingly unintended by the imagery used. Highlighting the honour and provision of a circumstance not all experience could in fact cause some individuals sorrow and pain due to their own lack or loss.

YHWH is named as the provider of both “sleep” and “children,” ִתְנִּיא and ִתְנִּיא (vv. 2d, 3a), although each of these eventualities normally requires the participation of the people involved. There is thus an ongoing relational dynamic envisaged for the people of God, living their lives to all appearances much as those without YHWH’s involvement do, but finding meaning and blessing in acknowledging and appreciating his interaction with them.

The two images used for children have implicit spatial dimensions: arrows (v. 4a) are to be sent out and enemies at the gate have advanced to that position (v. 5b).

\footnote{1100 See comments on this verse in section 3.10.2 above.}
As I prepared for my performances and considered the use of gestures during this section of the psalm, I observed the way these movements caused me to consider the interactions of life in the world, whether with family, the wider community, or outsiders. Enactors might not fully be able to realise all the connotations of these images in their own context, but these ideas can cause them intuitively to consider daily life as non-static as it responds to various circumstances and therefore allow the words of the psalm to shape their own imagined actions in living this out.

This psalm shifts the focus from the community as a whole to the life of the individual and their family within that community. It presents daily life as an opportunity to respond to YHWH’s work of building and blessing. As part of the pilgrimage collection, it serves as a reminder that the routines of daily life are part of the journey and any seeming futility in them is due to forgetting to allow YHWH in to every aspect.

7.9 Psalm 128: Producing

7.9.1 Text

Like Psalm 127, this psalm is focused on everyday life and as such has a wisdom tone, but the connection with Zion broadens the scope to include a national dimension. The traditional motifs of blessing – food, family, and fertility – also highlight its archetypal quality. The poem’s main movement is from the wisdom-saying description of blessing to the more liturgical pronouncement of blessing, with the possibility of different voices to enact these movements within the psalm. The second section also broadens the personal discourse to include the nation within its scope. The poem uses repetition both within and between the two sections, drawing it together as a whole. The connection to Zion as the source of blessing fits well within the pilgrimage horizon evoked by the title.
Following its use in the previous psalm, the macarism יְדֵי (v. 1) introduces the whole poem with a wisdom saying. The appositional phrase יְהֹוֶה בָּדַד (v. 1) uses the image of walking in YHWH’s paths common throughout wisdom literature\textsuperscript{1101} and the Psalter\textsuperscript{1102} but found only here in the collection. In light of the superscription, it can be understood as allowing the whole of life to be understood metaphorically as a pilgrimage or journey. The word בֵּין (v. 2) is used with the sense of that which is produced by work,\textsuperscript{1103} here specifically linked to the efforts of one’s own hands. The shift from third to second person is common within poetry but is more unexpected with a wisdom saying, which therefore develops into a personal statement of honour to the ones hearing the psalm enacted. The image of a vine, נֵצֶף (v. 3), is used only here for a wife but is often used for Israel,\textsuperscript{1104} adding a deeper resonance to the picture of abundance. The allusion is clearly to offspring.

Verse 4 uses the more theologically loaded word קְרָב,\textsuperscript{1105} adding to the experience of honour in the eyes of the community favour in the eyes of YHWH as well. The repetition of נִשְׁתָּה (v. 4) from verse 1 re-emphasises the importance of right relational status before YHWH as the precondition for all these benefits. The return to the second person singular in verse 5 allows the blessing – exemplified in verses 2–3 and promised as available to anyone in verse 4 – to be pronounced upon each hearer or enactor of the psalm. The source of blessing is YHWH but the words of the community have power in declaring it, “God’s activity can be actualized through human speech.”\textsuperscript{1106}

\textsuperscript{1101} For example, Prov 1:15; 2:13, 20; 16:29; Eccl 11:9.
\textsuperscript{1102} For example, Pss 32:8; 81:14; 86:11; 101:6; 119:1, 3; 143:8.
\textsuperscript{1103} BDB, 388.
\textsuperscript{1104} For example, Ps 80:9; Ezek 17:6–8; Jer 2:21; Hos 14:8.
\textsuperscript{1105} Prominent, for example, in the promises to Abraham in Gen 12:1–3.
(v. 5) can be understood as “theological geography,” both in that Zion is the place where YHWH dwells and that the blessing or prosperity of Jerusalem directly impacts the prosperity of the whole community of faith. The same idea is repeated in Ps 134:3 and alluded to in Ps 133:3. The formulaic phrase הַתּוֹרָה הַיְשֵׁיָה (v. 5b) is found in the Torah, notably in Deut 4:9 and 6:2 where it is also connected with children’s children. The final phrase נַפְלְתָה נַפְלְתָה נַפְלְתָה (v. 6b) is used only here and to conclude Psalm 125, but can be assumed to be a formulaic blessing. It adds a performative dimension and could have been spoken by a priest to the gathered community.

7.9.2 Performance

Psalm 128 encompasses similar themes of honour and blessing to the preceding psalm. That these are spoken to any who fear YHWH (v. 1) allowed me in performance to speak them directly to the community of faith, thereby continuing to elicit emotional responses of happiness and confidence for them. The opening metaphor for being in relationship with YHWH, “walking in his ways,” הלַחֵן הַרְדָּה (v. 1b), is common in the Psalter and would be familiar to the community of faith. In light of the superscription, this allows for the whole of life to be understood by enactors as a (metaphorical) pilgrimage, with the path and direction belonging to YHWH. There is thus a continued underlying picture of life as a journey. As enactors think of themselves as pilgrims, they are therefore proclaiming honour upon themselves with these words.

1107 Rohde, 37. See also Satterthwaite, 123.
1109 See also Gen 3:14, 17; Deut 16:3 (in connection with celebrating pilgrimage feasts); Deut 17:19. The same phrase with a first person suffix appears in Pss 23:6; 27:4.
1110 See Hossfeld and Zenger, 399 who note a “general exegetical consensus” that these words are redactional.
1111 For example, Pss 1:1; 32:8; 85:14; 86:11; 101:6; 119:3.
The fact that this particular psalm focuses on daily life away from Zion (vv. 2–3) means that this is greater than the imagined journey of a Israelite making their annual pilgrimage from a rural region to Jerusalem. The honour that comes from such a pilgrimage can be experienced in everyday life if the dynamic of the pilgrim-YHWH relationship is maintained in all circumstances. The resultant honour and blessing is described in terms of abundance in sustenance and family. During my performances, I observed the way these descriptions of fertility (vv. 2–3) are book-ended by two calls to enactors to “fear,” אד rituals (vv. 1a, 4b), YHWH, evoking the community of faith’s understanding of worship and wisdom in life. I also attended to the variation in the two corresponding declarations, “honour” and “blessing,” ירא and ברכה, with their concomitant shades of favour in the eyes of others and of God. I perceived that the text captures a sense of the totality of experience in these brief descriptions.

As the asseverative declaration is spoken by members of the enacting community to one another, “the produce of your hands you will surely eat,” ירגל הגוף כי ה胺 (v. 2a), it can evoke feelings of self-sustenance and the positive dimensions of pride or fulfilment. The singular second person pronouns attached to the pronouncements of “honour” and “goodness,” ירא and טוב (v. 2b), mean that individual enactors can receive these words directly from one another as words that have power to make what they declare so. In my performances, I noticed this impact on particular audience members as I directed these words to them, receiving smiles and nods. One audience member also commented upon this:

C10: Looking around at children, husbands and wives – seeing examples as the word was spoken highlighted the community aspect.

Another use of body imagery, “hand,” יד (v. 2a), coupled with the noun “produce,” ירגל (v. 2b), which indicates the result of physical labour, allows enactors to
imagine themselves tangibly experiencing the situation the words they are speaking describe. In one of my performances, I observed how the mention of eating caused me to become conscious of my mouth, as an imaginative connection was made with the physical experience of enjoying food. By using words deeply connected to physical experience, the text thus has the ability to cause enactors to imagine themselves engaging in these acts and to be influenced by this experience.

The similes used for wife and children, “vine” and “olive shoots,” שָׁרוֹן וַתֹּלְכֵים (v. 3), both connect to ideas of growth and fertility. For those who have experienced these blessings, they therefore engender feelings of happiness and pleasure. The specificity of the images appears to narrow the pronouncement of blessing from everyone, to men who are both husbands and fathers. In ancient patriarchal communities, this could have been understood as a blessing to the whole family through its head. In my performances, I spoke these words directly to those individuals who fit this description as examples of the kinds of blessings that come from relationship with YHWH.

These similes also both have spatial dimensions, “depths” and “surrounding,” דֶּפֶת and עָקַף (v. 3). These directional indicators tap into enactors’ imaginations, enhancing the impact of the imagery. Prinsloo proposes that the two halves of this psalm concentrate on private and public space respectively. In my performances, I noticed that in my imagination I connected the audience as individuals with this private space, picturing their daily lives and experiences outside the gathered community during the first half of this psalm. From verse 5, I physically turned toward the back of the performance stage, which in my imagination represented the location of “Zion,” inviting the individuals gathered into the experience of community envisaged there. The structure of the psalm thus encourages enactors to visualise the connections between

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1112 Prinsloo, “The Role of Space,” 468. Ventura, 374, also links this with the place of women (private) and men (public).
private and public space, between their daily lives in their families and their corporate life as the people of YHWH.

The whole psalm is an explication of blessing and concludes with yet another pronouncement (v. 5) specifically seeking YHWH’s blessing and connecting it doubly to the place of pilgrimage. Jerusalem is the centre from which YHWH’s blessing flows and to which enactors look to see the blessing exemplified. In my performances, I looked toward the highest point at the rear of the left hand side of the stage, where I had imagined the destination of Jerusalem to be. I had not prepared gestures, as “to see,” הָרַחֲצָה (vv. 5, 6), is visual, but in some performances I found myself subconsciously wanting to move my hands to convey the sense of movement of the blessing articulated. The text thus appears to evoke for enactors an imagined “flow” of blessing between Jerusalem and the location of their life and family. This links the present situation of the community with the pilgrimage destination and is bi-directional; the blessing sought comes from Zion and the content of the blessing received is seeing the city’s prosperity. In my performances, this engendered feelings of hope and desire toward the city and the closeness it represents with both YHWH and the community of faith. It could also provoke happiness and even surprise for community members that the blessing is available in their own everyday situation as well.

The hope extends into the future – throughout the life of the recipient and even beyond – as the naming of the next two generations (v. 6a) causes enactors to imagine their family long into the future and feel an associated sense of optimism. As in Psalm 125, the concluding benediction (v. 6b) speaks peace upon the enacting community, serving to affirm feelings of contentment. The blessing evokes the richness of peace and prosperity found in Psalm 122 at YHWH’s dwelling place and calls for it to be experienced everywhere and at all times (v. 5b). The text thus has the effect of calling
the pilgrim community to envisage the “peace,” הַלְוָיָן, of Jerusalem spreading far and wide. Being in relationship with YHWH is understood as experiencing wholeness of life. The psalm continues the focus on the productivity of every day life and work but places this as central to what YHWH is doing from Zion, meaning a simple linear understanding of pilgrimage cannot be sustained. The collection presents a broader, more encompassing perspective on life as a member of this community.

7.10 Psalm 129: Suffering

7.10.1 Text

Psalm 129 contains no direct petition, nor does it address YHWH. The initial direct address within the psalm is to the community of Israel, inviting them to participate in and make the song their own. The concluding direct address is spoken by the community, imagining themselves as passers-by, to their enemies. This dramatisation suggests multiple voices. The recounting of oppression gives it a tone of lament, before the clear statement of YHWH’s righteous character moves to engender confidence within the enacting community. The metaphors appear to be mixed but predominantly based on agricultural imagery. The social dimensions of honour and shame present in the previous two psalms are again evoked.

As in Psalms 120 and 123, מָעַן (v. 1) is used adverbially. As an echo of the previous occurrences, it abruptly opens the psalm with endurance of suffering. Neither the speaker nor the enemies are immediately identified, but the first person singular


pronoun initially suggests an individual lament. The invitation for the gathered community to repeat these words, יִאמוּר נָא תְרַמְּלֵי (v. 1), transforms the psalm into a collective cry, with “I” the personification of Israel. As in Ps 124:1, this formulaic interjection adds a liturgical and performative dimension to the psalm. Israel’s נֶהְרָה (v. 2) could refer to the nation’s time in the wilderness and entrance into the land of Canaan, accentuating that Israel’s suffering has been throughout her history at the hands of various enemies. The effect of the imagery in verse 3 is the picture of an individual with extensive injuries personifying Israel’s oppression and humiliation.

The image of the “cord,” נֶבֶט (v. 4), appears to refer to the underlying corporate metaphor of Israel as under a foreign yoke and thus the wicked as national enemies. The description “all who hate Zion,” כָּל שֵׁלָם ציון (v. 5), is in apposition to the “wicked,” רַשִּׁים (v. 4), but the specific focus on Zion suggests foreign enemies and oppressors. “Haters of Zion” is used only here in biblical Hebrew. The simile of dry grass, נָמָה נַעַמְתָּ (v. 6), also appears for those defeated and put to shame in 2 Kgs 19:26 and Isa 37:27. The image is one of impermanence and insignificance. The irony is the enemies who “ploughed” Israel are now themselves imagined as a failed harvest (v. 7).

The third ill wish upon the enemies is another lack of blessing, this time the withholding of spoken words of benediction, אֲמָהָר (v. 8). The effect of translating the qatal verbs throughout verses 6–8 as past tense is to present the wished for scenario from the perspective of it having been completed, highlighting the lack of status and shame resultant for the enemies at the end of the imagined situation.

1115 See Gunkel and Begrich, 122; Adri J. O. van der Wal, “The Structure of Psalm 129,” VT 38 (1988): 364–367, 365 who reads this as a priestly summons; Mannati, 96 who calls this psalm both ritual action and dialogue.
1116 The cord being what connects the yoke to the plough. See Hossfeld and Zenger, 413–16. LXX has an even more violent image, with YHWH συγκοπτω (“cutting to pieces”) the αὐχήν (“throat”) of the enemy.
1117 Ventura, 369, provides an interesting perspective as she distinguishes the two groups not as the wicked and the righteous, but as the oppressors and resistors.
appears to refer to a custom of passers-by speaking words of blessing upon those 
harvesting and implies such well-wishes were normally expected.\textsuperscript{1118} The words 
מְרַמֶּהּ וּמְרַמֶּהּ (v. 8) are similar to the exchange of greetings between harvesters and 
their overseer (Boaz) in Ruth 2:4. If words of blessing were expected to be given in 
such a setting, their deliberate absence could implicitly function as akin to a curse.\textsuperscript{1119} 
The repetition of words of blessing (v. 8) functions either as a response or a doubled 
blessing, but in either case is again withheld in the imagined scenario and not spoken 
upon the enemies.

\textit{7.10.2 Performance}

Psalm 129 continues to assume that the world of the pilgrim is separated into “us” and 
“them,” opening with an accusation against an unnamed “they” (vv. 1a, 2a) who can 
therefore represent for enactors any enemy or oppressor outside the community. During 
my performances, I discerned that it did not matter that the “they” referred to are not 
named or specified. It is clear to the gathered community that the reference is to 
outsiders and thus the effect of the text is to divide the world into two clear groups.

When enacting the collection as a whole, the opening statement of Psalm 129 
brings an abrupt emotional change, from hopefulness in the future to grief and fury 
because of the past. The repeated word “to be hostile,” נאם (vv. 1, 2) is an emotive 
word,\textsuperscript{1120} immediately conjuring up opposition and therefore responses of anger. The 
pairing of two temporal markers – the adverb “long,” רָאָמ, and the many years\textsuperscript{1121} 
evoked by “from my youth,” מַלְטָנֶה (vv. 1, 2) – emphasises and deepens the imagery

\textsuperscript{1118} Christopher Wright Mitchell, \textit{The Meaning of brk “to bless” in the Old Testament} (Atlanta: Scholars 
Press, 1987).
\textsuperscript{1119} See Botha, “A Social-Scientific Reading,” 1406.
\textsuperscript{1120} It occurs almost exclusively within poetic texts and refers to the actions of enemies. H. Ringgren, ““נאם” 
\textsuperscript{1121} This could even been understood to mean generations, if the whole image is taken as an identification 
with the story of the community’s history.
and the emotional experience associated with it. Thus without specifying an enemy or
an act of opposition, enactors are emotionally primed to feel hurt and antagonism. The
explicit invitation to the community to unite in declaring this statement (v. 1b) serves to
depthen the sense of woundedness and outrage.

The subsequent metaphor of a ploughed back is shocking in its starkness, the
experience of hostility likened to graphic physical violence (v. 3), again deepening the
emotional impact. In the midst of these evocations of sorrow is a statement of defiance,
with the outcome, “yet they have not prevailed,” מִכְלָא לֶא יָהֲלָא (v. 2b), included even
before the painful experience is explicitly recounted. This nuances the effect. I observed
a tone of determination in my voice when performing this line, which thus appears to
allow enactors to feel resolute and resilient in their endurance. If the image is heard with
a corporate referent, with the first person singular standing in for Israel, it also provides
another moment of solidarity for the community.

The use of the body, specifically the “back,” בֹּק (v. 3), in the imagery of
oppression powerfully taps into the imagination. The picture is one of vulnerability and
weakness with the speaker represented as a single human body and the oppressors with
the power to control and abuse. The “us” and “them” are therefore not two equal
groups; the community is invited to imagine itself as weak and at the mercy of outsiders.
It is only the intervention of one even more powerful, YHWH (v. 4), that changes the
situation. The psalm thus ends with a reversal of sorts, but it does not come from the
community retaliating or defeating the enemy. Their power is not in their actions, but
rather in their ability to withhold (v. 8) the blessing of YHWH. During my performances,
I observed how the linking of shame with the spatial phrase “to be turned back,” שָׁנֵ
(v. 5), caused me to dismiss these enemies in my imagination as belonging outside the
performance – and therefore community – space. Thus the effect of the text is to place

See Gillmayr-Bucher, 494, who says, “The body becomes the space in which history unfolds.”
the two groups of people in two different spaces, within and outside the favour of YHWH.

YHWH is absent from the first half of Psalm 129 and in my performances I observed how this absence has the effect of heightening the negative imagery (vv. 1–3) and connecting the sense of pain and fear to being away from, or outside of relationship with, him. This is abruptly rectified with the first categorical declaration of YHWH’s character found in the collection: he is “righteous,” חmodo (v. 4a). This theological declaration provides a dramatic turn and the impetus for thankfulness and praise. This righteousness has been displayed in his actions on his people’s behalf. Those who are against YHWH’s people are presented as being against him.

The antagonism felt toward the enemy is not dissipated, as the psalm moves not to the benefits for the community of faith but focuses on the consequences to the other (vv. 5–8). In my performances I had to direct the following words “off-stage” to the imagined enemy and observed a bitter undertone in saying such harsh words. By inviting those present to pronounce a malediction, therefore, the psalm elicits a sense of justification in the anger it provokes. The pronouncements are antonymous to those spoken by the community to one another in earlier psalms.

There is a subtlety to the punishment meted out by YHWH, as in Psalm 125. The image of cutting off the cord (v. 4b) is one of preventing them from continuing in their oppression rather than of directly attacking them. Similarly, the “curse” the community is invited to speak against their oppressors is one of turning back (v. 5a), withering (v. 6a), and shame (v. 5a), that is, not experiencing blessing rather than fiery retribution.

The enemy is initially addressed in the third person (vv. 5–6), maintaining a sense of distance and otherness from the enacting pilgrim community. The

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1123 See Kelsey, Eccentric Existence, 521–22, who talks about anger as a “complex and annihilating emotion” which can nevertheless be disciplined to be an appropriate response to what God is doing.
consequences pronounced upon the enemy are counterpoints to the hoped-for experience of the community: shame rather than honour, turning back rather than coming together, barrenness rather than fertility, empty rather than full hands. The community is invited further into the imaginative experience of witnessing their enemies’ downfall with the concluding statements of blessing that are here spoken (v. 8) but in the imagined scenario explicitly withheld. This allows enactors to feel simultaneously both something akin to Schadenfreude at the fate of the wicked as well as joy at their own situation, due to the implied reminder of the powerful impact of such pronouncements, which have been and will be spoken upon them. The shift to first person plural in the final statement (v. 8b) provides an occasion of solidarity for the community as they imagine themselves withholding from their enemies their most powerful words of benediction. I found the tone of this final line one of the most difficult to capture in my performances, experimenting with sarcasm, then scorn. The emotive effect therefore seems to be complex, as enactors are placed in a position of imaginatively provoking emotions in others at the same time as they respond to the effect of so doing upon themselves.

The final lines of this psalm indicate that the harshest consequence envisaged is the withholding of YHWH’s blessing (v. 8). In my performances I attended closely to the subtext here and considered a variety of tones of voice in which to make these statements of “un-blessing.” I decided against sarcasm, which though more natural in my context felt inappropriate to the tone of the collection as a whole, choosing instead to understand these wishes as a genuine outworking of the understanding that blessing is found in relationship with YHWH and therefore being assigned to live outside that relationship is in and of itself the community’s most powerful censure. The community
of faith’s oppressors and enemies are thereby dismissed and barely feature again in the collection.\textsuperscript{1124}

For the pilgrimage community, this psalm focuses on their suffering and is a significant reminder that the journey is not simply from pain to bliss. Their historical experience tells them otherwise. The life of the pilgrim includes opposition and oppression. But there is also hope to be found in YHWH’s righteousness and justice.

7.11 Waypoint: Pausing

Although Psalms 127 and 128 have often been grouped together due to their shared wisdom features, it is not immediately obvious that Psalm 129 belongs to the same subgrouping. It could perhaps stand alone. But in the unfolding pilgrimage of the collection, there is an appropriateness to pausing at this point to consider the cumulative effect of these three psalms. Unlike the previous four psalms, these three do not contain direct addresses to YHWH, but are predominantly words spoken by community members to one another. They also share an emphasis on the social dimensions of honour and shame. Psalms 127 and 128 invite members of the community to speak words of blessing upon one another and Psalm 129 explicitly calls them to withhold words of blessing from those outside the community. The use of imagery from everyday life is common to all three with city, home, family, and farming all featuring prominently. Together, the first two psalms provide a powerful picture of the role of YHWH in providing everyday blessing to his people as they enjoy walking through life in relationship with him, which is then contrasted in the third psalm with their power to withhold that blessing from those who have wronged them.

\textsuperscript{1124} There is a passing mention of David’s enemies in Ps 132:18, but this works to heighten the emphasis on YHWH’s blessings upon Zion rather than draw focus back to those outside the community.
In light of the collection as a whole, these three psalms function to connect the pilgrimage experience to daily life in all its joys as well as its suffering. They ensure that the Pilgrim Psalter presents a robust picture of life as a member of the community of faith, one that is broad enough to encompass all experiences and see them as part of the journey.

7.12 Psalm 130: Crying

7.12.1 Text

Unlike the previous psalm, this song does not focus on enemies but on Israel’s own sin and need for forgiveness. There is no specific identification of this sin, allowing it to be used by later enacting communities and spoken by a leader on behalf of that community.\(^\text{1125}\) There is a cry to be heard, but again no other specific request. Although it might therefore be understood as a lament,\(^\text{1126}\) or more commonly a penitential psalm,\(^\text{1127}\) and although there is no clear answer within the poem itself, the overall theological tone is one of hope and trust. The conclusion repeats key words from earlier in the poem, with the speaking individual exhorting the wider community to learn from and adopt the same posture, again allowing space for multiple voices.

The preposition Ṣw (v. 1) begins this psalm with a sense of distance, even separation.\(^\text{1129}\) The opening words, in Latin De Profundis, are a common title for the psalm “because they express a universal experience of despair and lostness.”\(^\text{1130}\) The

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\(^{1125}\) Similarities with the prayers of Nehemiah and Daniel have been noted, for example, by Goldingay, 522–23; Gerstenberger, *Psalms: Part II*, 356–57; Hossfeld and Zenger, 426.

\(^{1126}\) For example, Stocks, 150; Bellinger, 62–63.

\(^{1127}\) Alter, 455. See Hossfeld and Zenger, 426.


\(^{1130}\) Patrick Miller, “Psalm 130,” 177.
direct address following the act of calling indicates the content of that cry. The use of the title נָעִי (v. 2) with the first person suffix designates an assertion of a personal relationship on which the cry is predicated. The rhetorical question, נָעִי (v. 2), following the conditional clause implies a negative answer, a subtext that could be conveyed by movement away from the one being addressed. As in the previous psalm, the turning point of the poem occurs with a non-verbal clause articulating the character of YHWH. יָדָל (v. 4) is used only for YHWH and as a noun only in prayers, marking this specifically as the language of supplication.

The shift to third person in verse 5 indicates the speaker is now addressing others. The direct repetition of the verb הָוְעָל (v. 5) is emotionally intensified by the use of base, signifying the whole being. The expectation has specific content: הָוְעָל (v. 5), the psalmist is looking for a verbal response to his cries. As well as introducing the metaphor, the repetition of the pronouns and of the terms for the self and YHWH, יָדָל (v. 6), poetically and dramatically personalise the recounting. Those who have been addressed since verse 5 are named in verse 7, with an imperative exhortation to learn from the experience of the individual speaker. This exhortation functions as a liturgical summons, making the performative nature of the psalm clear.

The construction יָדָל (v. 7) echoes verse 4, introducing another declaration about YHWH’s character. The repetition of the Tetragrammaton shifts the emphasis from the individual’s personal relationship with him to his revealed relationship with the nation. Once again non-verbal clauses articulate key attributes of YHWH, יָדָל (v. 7), recalling his self-description in Exod 34 and the attitude that

1131 See Martin Rösel, Adonaj – warum Gott ‘Herr’ gennant wird (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 195, “besondere persönliche Beziehung” (a “special personal relationship.”)
1132 Ps 129:4.
1133 Here and in Neh 9:17; Dan 9:9. See J. Hausmann, يָדָל,” TDOT, 10:259.
1134 This can be viewed as a general word from YHWH, so Gert T. M. Prinsloo, “Psalms 130: Poetic Patterns and Social Significance,” OTE 15 (2002): 453–469, 463; or if understood in a cultic setting, an oracle given by the priest, so Kraus, Psalms 60–150, 467.
underpins his covenant promises. Furthermore, YHWH’s actions in redeeming, הושיב (v. 7), demonstrate another foundational attribute. As well as individual purchase from slavery and rescue from distress, the verb is used for YHWH’s saving act in the exodus\textsuperscript{1135} and for his promised rescue of Israel from foreign oppression.\textsuperscript{1136} Only here does it refer to rescue from sin.

7.12.2 Performance

The enemy having been dismissed at the end of Psalm 129, the next psalm, and indeed the remainder of the collection, focuses on the life of the community of faith. Psalm 130 opens with another spatial metaphor, with the enactor crying “from the depths,” יבש (v. 1). Here the distance is from YHWH and caused by the internal life of the supplicant. In my performances, I observed the different way I imagined and portrayed this distance from that spoken about in Psalm 120, primarily represented as horizontal rather than vertical. There the sense is of isolation from the presence of YHWH due to disconnection from the community (Ps 120:5), whereas here the dislocation is between the enacting community and YHWH. Within their own lives, members of the enacting community can experience a sense of separation from YHWH. At the same time, YHWH is the one to whom they cry (v. 1), seeking to bridge this gap. This cry contains the only time within the collection when body imagery is used for YHWH, “ear,” פנים (v. 2), the anthropomorphism serving as a reminder of YHWH’s responsiveness and closeness to his people.

Psalm 130 also abruptly shifts the emotional focus to the individual, with the change to first person singular combined with the repeated address of YHWH inviting

\textsuperscript{1136} Isa 1:27; Jer 15:21; 31:11; Zech 10:8; Pss 25:22; 34:23.
enactors to make these words their own prayer. One audience member specifically noted this in response to my performance:

C14: [The performer] said ... that the Psalms gave her the words to express her feelings to God. I certainly related to this, especially in her recitation of Psalm 130.

During my performances, I stepped away from the audience at this point as the solidarity of the previous psalm gave way to the sense of an intimate prayer between the individual speaker and YHWH. The opening words of this psalm return to the distress felt in the opening words of the collection as a whole, with the imagery here deepening feelings of isolation (v. 1). In contrast to that psalm, here the focus is not on outward actions (connoted in Ps 120:2 by lips, tongue) or the influence of others (Ps 120:6, dwelling amongst), but on the inward condition of the supplicant, their iniquity (v. 3). The request is doubled, “please listen,” “be attentive,” חלוצה ... בנהיה (vv. 2a, 2b), and the direct address is tripled, “you,” “O YHWH,” “my Lord,” “הנה, ידוהי, ה” (vv. 1, 2a), and in my performances I experienced how these features placed me in a position of dependence. The text thus emphasises feelings of helplessness and penitence. The psalm brings enactors to a place of pleading, even begging.

Relationally, Psalms 130 and 131 present the most intimate portrayals of the bond between the enacting community and YHWH. The title “Lord,” ידוהי, is used three times (vv. 2a, 3b, 6a), its only occurrences in the collection, and each time it is accompanied by the first person singular suffix. This repetition has the effect of highlighting two aspects of the relationship between enactor and YHWH: that it is a relationship of unequals and that it is a relationship of personal connection. As in the opening psalm, a cry to YHWH is recounted (v. 1), but the content of the cry differs significantly. In Psalm 120 the request is for deliverance. Comparable appeals are made in Psalms 123 and 125 for favour and in Psalm 126 for restoration. This cry, in contrast,
is for what has been assumed in each of those previous cries: a hearing (v. 2). Attending to this in my performances elicited a different relational posture before YHWH. Whereas previous prayers in the collection had been addressed with confidence and hope, there was a palpable sense of doubt at this point. The text appears to invite enactors to consider as a genuine possibility that YHWH might not listen to them. It appeared that one audience member had a similar sense.

R5: When we do pray – it tends to be more polite, and not ask too much of God so we won’t be disappointed.

The reason for the question is found in the subsequent scenario (v. 3a), where the image of YHWH as “guardian,” שַׁמָּה, is taken up from Psalm 121 but applied in a new way. If YHWH were to act with his characteristic attentiveness when it comes to enactors’ iniquities, then relationally speaking, all would be lost. In analysing the depth of emotion present at this point in my performances, I considered that there is an underlying tension for enactors as they seek to hold together various attributes of YHWH.

In terms of the affective impact, a potential scenario is conceived and it is devastating: if YHWH kept and guarded the supplicant’s iniquities, as their lives are kept and guarded (Ps 121), then they would not be able to stand (v. 3). I found that the repetition of “my Lord,” רָצִית (v. 3b), placed in the middle of the fictive situation, could hardly be spoken without an imploring tone, leading the rhetorical question to be answered in my heart and body with a desperate “not me,” which led me in later performances to bend my knees and take a further staggering step backwards.1137 The import of all these features is to bring the enactor to a place of humility and abasement before YHWH, the lowest emotional point of the entire collection. Yet the posture of supplication maintains a level of hopefulness.

1137 I considered dropping to my knees, but given both my cultural context and my personality, I was concerned this would appear forced or overly dramatic. This would, however, doubtless feel like an appropriate physical response during this psalm for at least some.
Kinaesthetically, imagining YHWH “guarding,” ה вамָלָם, (v. 3) their iniquities in the same way he guarded their life (Ps 121:7), enactors are invited to consider their own physical position in his presence.1138 During my performances, I observed that the implication of falling to my knees created an even greater sense of distance between the self and YHWH. Thus the text allows enactors to visualise the fact that the gap is not as wide as it could be, indeed, the “forgiveness,” סְלָם, (v. 4), offered by YHWH minimises it.

The cry is suddenly and dramatically answered with this declaration about the character of YHWH: “for with him is the forgiveness,” כִּי מִלְבֹּם הָאֱלֹהִים (v. 4a). When I attended to these words in some performances, I felt a genuine sense of relief and gratefulness elicited by them. Thus in one short phrase, one is taken from the depths of despair to wonder and freedom. The eyes continue to be lifted, moreover, as the reason stated for the forgiveness offered is about YHWH (v. 4b), not the one receiving forgiveness. I heard an unplanned emphasis on the word “you” in my voice at this point, demonstrating how this phrase works to highlight the undeservedness experienced.

Relationally, the effect of the text is to entertain the possibility of doubt and distance just long enough to highlight that in YHWH it is overcome. The wording “with you,” לָךְ (v. 4a), rather than “you show,” makes forgiveness not only an activity YHWH does, but an essential aspect of his character. YHWH is not only “righteous,” צִדְקֵה (Ps 129:4), he is also merciful. As in Psalm 126, the declaration of YHWH’s character is not merely for the benefit of the community, although they certainly receive much in response to their plea. The reason given for YHWH’s forgiveness is his own honour and fame (v. 4b).

The psalm abruptly shifts from speaking to YHWH to speaking about YHWH (v. 5) In my preparation I recognised that this required a pause and movement from

1138 See De Troyer.
looking upwards in prayer to addressing the audience directly. In my performances, there was a heightened awareness of the presence of the audience at this point, as I moved from a pleading, prayerful posture, to speaking words of encouragement and even instruction to others. This shift in address thus reminds enactors that their profound emotional experience has occurred not in a private moment with YHWH, but in the midst of the community. Part of the joy of the experience is sharing it with one another, declaring what has occurred and inviting participation in it.

Enactors turn to address other members of the community and by repeating the verb “hope,” הָקָם (v. 5a), share the sense of expectancy that brought light into the darkness of the individual experience recounted. The idea of waiting (v. 5b) tempers any simplistic understanding of the emotions present. In my performances, I discerned a sense of being calmed at this point as the idea of being patient was evoked. The text appears to consider a time when the answer has not yet come, just as those guarding a city wait through the darkness until the dawn (v. 6). I observed that the repetition of the image has the added effect of slowing the pace both literally and metaphorically.

The dynamism of the relationship between enactors and YHWH is highlighted by the shift back to the recounting of past actions, hope in and waiting for him, הָקָם and לֹא (v. 5). In my performances, I observed the difference in tone from the earlier cry in this psalm. Although performing verses 2–3 evoked distress and possible doubt, these words elicited expectation and conviction. The fact that the psalm moves to ideas of waiting (vv. 5, 6) also brings with it an implication of stillness. In one performance, I noticed I was holding my breath as I entered into the motionlessness of these words. The distance is bridged not by the enacting community but only by YHWH.

The psalm concludes with an explicit call to the pilgrimage community to join in these emotions and actions (v. 7a), summed up in the idea of waiting. Assurance is
given that this is worthwhile, naming some of the great attributes of YHWH displayed and declared throughout the community’s historical experience: “faith love” and “redemption,” סֶרֶךְ זְרֵעַ and חָסֵד (vv. 7b, 7c). In one of my performances, I noticed that without planning to, I was drawing on the sense of sharing my personal testimony with others at this point, affirming truths I believe from my own experience so as to persuade the audience that this is available for them too. It seems the effect of the text is to remind enactors of their own redemption and beloved status while contemporaneously calling on them to long for this on an ongoing basis for one another and for the community as a whole. These truths are then applied specifically to the current pilgrimage community, understood to be the “Israel” spoken of (v. 8a), personalising the great declarations and possibly linking them to their sense of guilt or shame previously aroused by imagining whether they could stand in YHWH’s presence. The double pronoun (v. 8a) can also engender a sense of intimacy in relationship with YHWH. The psalm thus ends with a promise of totality, “all,” כל (v. 8b), taking enactors in this one psalm from the depths to the heights.

The two declarative statements about YHWH’s character (v. 7), with the wording “with him” provide confidence that these are attributes he will consistently demonstrate in all his interactions with his people. YHWH’s “faithful love” and “redemption,” חָסֵד and חָוָדֶשׁ, are named. Both descriptions are theologically loaded, linked to statements and stories throughout the Scriptures where YHWH is defined by these terms. In the psalm, each unequivocal statement about YHWH’s character is linked to a response or result for his people. His love is the reason they wait upon him (v. 7) and his redemption is the reason they receive forgiveness for their iniquities (v. 8). During my performances I observed how these verses functioned as promises made by me to the audience, assuring them of the consistent, faithful character of their God and in so doing

1139 Particularly the exodus narrative, see Exod 13–15; Deut 7:8–9.
calling them to respond relationally to him. The effect of the text is thus to engage the enacting community relationally with one another and with YHWH, reminding themselves of who he is and thus who they are and what they have experienced as his people. The psalm as a whole presents a cry to YHWH that does not go unheeded and that inspires further dependence upon him.

7.13 Psalm 131: Waiting

7.13.1 Text

One of the shortest poems in the collection, Psalm 131 has often elicited emotional responses. Its personal and individual tone leads some to argue it shows “no sign of cultic or public function,” but its place within the collection as well as the exhortation in verse 3 suggests it can serve a broader role within the community. Some modern attention to the poem has focused on the possibility it was written by or for women, yet the link to David in the title suggests its availability for use by all who identify with the struggles of pride and humility.

The Tetragrammaton is placed emphatically (v. 1), functioning as a vocative and marking the opening of this psalm as a prayer. The phrasing, for example הָבֵן אֶל (v. 1), is typical of an assertion of innocence, possibly suggesting opponents who have made such an accusation, but more likely disavowing the typical behaviour of the wicked. The低压, (v. 1), points to the innermost parts of the speaker and can even be

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1140 Even, uncharacteristically, from Gunkel, 563, who writes of it, “Ein furzer Stoßleufzer!” (“A little sigh”).
1141 Alter, 457.
1142 Hossfeld and Zenger, 450–51, say some suggest it is the literary imitation of a renunciation ritual.
1143 See ibid., 447.
1144 Ibid.
1145 See, for example, Pss 17:1; 18:21–22; 26:4.
1146 So Gerstenberger, Psalms: Part II, 360.
understood as akin to the conscience.¹¹⁴⁷ The יָשָׁם, (v. 1), is often used in biblical Hebrew for “psychic emotions” such as desire, pride, and longing.¹¹⁴⁸ The parallelism thus moves from an inward focus to outward looking attitudes. The progression in the bodily imagery continues with “walking,” נָשָׁה (v. 1), now encompassing conduct. The idea of נָשָׁה (v. 1), as one’s whole being here gives a sense of culmination to the imagery, moving from mind, attitudes, and actions to “all of the above.”

The picture of a הָנָה (v. 2) is of a child who no longer needs breastfeeding, content to lay upon its mother without needing anything from her,¹¹⁴⁹ which imaginatively describes the ideas of an inner life calmed and not seeking or grasping for things beyond its reach. The reiteration of the image with the additional first person pronoun shifts the picture from one of observing a child upon its mother to visualising a child upon oneself, emphasising the emotional experience of both child and mother.

With the imperative הָנָה (v. 3), the psalm shifts from addressing YHWH to addressing the congregation directly. Whether or not this verse is an editorial addition to an original poem, its function is to call the enacting community to be like the individual pray-er, possibly suggesting liturgical use. The command is repeated from the previous psalm, but the context of the preceding verses give content to the attitudes with which one waits or hopes. The liturgical formula מְסִמִּית לְהַלֹּהוֹ (v. 3) is repeated from Pss 121:8 and 125:2 to conclude the psalm. Its connection here with waiting, הָנָה, introduces an eschatological dimension, suggesting the waiting is not temporary until something happens, but is an ongoing relational disposition toward YHWH.

¹¹⁴⁹ Grohmann, 517. See also Beyerlin, Wider die Hybris.
7.13.2 *Performance*

The canonical arrangement of the collection allows enactors to build on their imagined experience of the sense of stillness from the previous psalm into this one. Here, every image connected to movement is negated (v. 1) before the community is invited to picture themselves as a child resting upon its mother (v. 2). Attending to this negation in performance, my body was almost motionless during the first two verses of this psalm, with movement of my eyes used to indicate that the opening vocative addresses the psalm as a prayer to YHWH. The text thus calls for minimal real or imagined movement and its spatial dimension is initially vertical only, as the individual speaks and waits upon YHWH. This is underscored by the use of bodily imagery, “heart,” ניב (v. 1a), “eyes,” יָמָשׁ (v. 1b), feet (walking) (v. 1c), arms (holding a child) (v. 2), which invites enactors to be attuned to stilling their own physical movements.1150

Psalm 131 could at first glance be viewed as emotionally incongruous with the previous psalm, given that those who have been invited to lament over their iniquities are now called to declare their innocence.1151 Rather than inconsistency, however, the placing of these two poems together underscores the emotional range and paradoxical nature of the human experience. A lived life is not emotionally or spiritually simplistic or neat. It is authentic to our experience to feel both guilt and innocence, shame and virtue. This was certainly my experience in performing the collection at this point, observing in myself a recognition that the two psalms present two different yet equally true experiences within which I could place myself. Enacting the collection as a whole thus allows members of the pilgrim community to place themselves in each emotional

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1150 See Gillmeyr-Bucher, 494, who speaks of “controlling any ambitions the body parts may have.”
1151 This incongruity was observed by one audience member in a personal comment after the performance: due to the way I had chosen to embody the attitudes of these psalms – the attitude of prayer during Psalm 130 was represented by looking “up” toward YHWH – the words “my eyes have not been raised” were seen as contradictory.
state in turn, identifying first with the sorrow of contrition and then with the joy of humility.

The use of David’s name in the title underscores this duality of experience, the historical David being remembered as both a “man after God’s own heart” on whose lips these words can be seen as appropriate and yet a man infamous for murder and adultery, finding himself when confronted by the prophet Nathan in a situation appropriately thought of as “the depths.” Thus the same person can speak both psalms with integrity, whether imagining different situations or periods of life, or holding in tension the complexity of human experience.

This psalm focuses on the personal, individual relationship of enactors and YHWH, albeit still in the context of the community of faith. The opening vocative, “O YHWH,” (v. 1a), addresses this as a simple, heartfelt prayer, providing a sense of intimacy between the speaker and YHWH. As a prayer, the individual pilgrim speaks this psalm to YHWH. It is a simple statement of humility, recognising the limits of human achievement and wisdom in the presence of the divine. This is underscored by the disposition taken before YHWH of stillness and quietness (v. 2a). I found the use of the English word “No!” to preface this in my performances caused me to attend to the next words spoken in a way that allowed them to be affective. I became more still and quieted in my body and voice at this point, leading also to a calming of my emotions.

YHWH is not himself described in the opening verse, but the descriptions of what the self is not imply a counterpoint to be found in him. That is, YHWH is visualised as the one who is “high,” נבוך (v. 1a), “raised up,” רם (v. 1b), and “walking in great things,” הלך בנחלות (v. 1c).

1152 After one performance, an audience member who is familiar with this psalm commented that the impact of the performance of this psalm for her was of feeling like she was intruding on a private moment between me and my God, affirming this sense of intimacy.
The simile of a weaned child (v. 2) augments the attitude of humility by generating the feelings of tenderness and dependence commonly evoked in connection with infants. The repeated pronoun (vv. 2b, 2c) provides vividness to the imagery, with the child wholly supported by and resting upon the mother. The word mother itself evokes profound emotional resonances.1153 Thus, despite the different circumstances, the emotions of utter dependence and trust resonate in harmony with the previous psalm.

The simile in verse 2 does not explicitly state that YHWH is like a mother (מָּאָם), but the inference is clear. This presents YHWH as tender, loving, and gentle and reiterates the intimacy and dependence of the relationship his people have to him. In my performances, I observed that as an adult, visualising a child upon its mother involved visualising a child in my own arms; it is much more difficult in practice to picture myself as the child. This perspective on the image is then affirmed by the addition of “upon me,” יָבִיא (v. 2c), in the final line of the simile. The effect of the text is therefore to invite us to put ourselves in YHWH’s place, identifying with him as the one holding us content in his arms. Enactors are thus drawn into the image in two different ways, thinking of themselves as the child but visualising themselves also as YHWH holding that child. The mutuality of the relational image is thereby enhanced. The final invitation of the psalm to “wait,” יִרְאוּ (v. 3a), repeated from the previous song, encourages one to continue in this position of dependent and contented relationship indefinitely (v. 3b).

This final verse adds the horizontal dimension as the individual speaker turns to implore the community (v. 3), who have thus far been present but unaddressed. In my performances, I imagined my posture and stillness during the first two verses of the psalm becoming at this point a visual model of the invitation I was making to the

1153 See Burke, 127, who gives the word “mother” as one example of a “highly charged word” which evokes deep emotional responses.
audience. The eidetic effect of the entire psalm is thus one of stillness from the motions of life in the intimate presence of the divine, with an invitation to the community to enact this posture in their own circumstances and situations.

Emotionally, the individual is again reminded that their experience is taking place within a wider community and the psalm causes them to turn to that community and call all its members to the same attitude of humble trust in waiting upon YHWH. The exhortation from the previous psalm is repeated, but the added dimension here is the temporal statement (v. 3b) that this disposition is ongoing into the future. In light of the preponderance of movement within the collection as a whole, this psalm of stillness and waiting is an important addition. Pilgrimage is not merely active; it is responsive. There are times when the call is not to rush forward, but to wait.

7.14 Waypoint: Pausing

Psalms 130 and 131 are commonly treated as a pair, particularly due to their almost identical endings. They also share an individual speaker who then turns to address the present community, direct address to YHWH, a personal tone, and imagery of intimacy in relationship. For all these reasons, they provide another appropriate waypoint within the collection to pause and gather together some themes. The two psalms present contrasting emotional pictures with their opening postures of guilt and innocence. Psalm 130 makes explicit and expansive statements about YHWH’s character, whereas Psalm 131 provides descriptions only by implication: what the speaker is not (v. 1) and the unnamed mother in the simile (v. 2). Both psalms invite individual enactors into an intimate experience of humble prayer with a clear sense of deep personal relationship with YHWH. They allow individuals to recount their own experience before turning to

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1154 See Hossfeld and Zenger, 439. See also Viviers, “The Coherence”; Gillingham.
the wider community of faith to urge others unequivocally to participate in the same relational experiences for themselves. The two psalms work together to demonstrate that as members of the pilgrim community, whether feeling guilt or humble virtue, the appropriate emotional response to YHWH’s presence in our midst is one of trust.
Chapter 8: The destination and effect of pilgrimage

8.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a theological interpretation of the final three psalms of the collection that is based on both careful analysis and translation of the text and insights gleaned from performance of that translation, with a focus on the effects of the text considered based on its affective, kinaesthetic, and relational dimensions. It then draws together insights from Chapters 6–8 as a whole to consider the overall worldmaking effect of all fifteen psalms.

8.2 Psalms 132–134: Enjoying

The final three psalms of the collection can be viewed together as a conclusion to the whole.\textsuperscript{1155} Their particular focus on the location of the gathered community at Jerusalem and the blessings experienced there provides a fitting finale to the pilgrimage journey of the collection. Emotionally they are focused on the experiences of joy and contentment, leaving enactors with a sense of satisfaction in having walked through the collection as a whole. As well as the corporate perspective found in each of these three psalms, they have an overarching focus on the place of YHWH in the lives of his people as the one who draws them together and to himself.

\textsuperscript{1155} They are grouped together, for example, by Hossfeld and Zenger, 290–91; Gillingham, 95; Viviers, “The Coherence,” 284–87; Prinsloo, “The Role of Space,” 473.
8.3 Psalm 132: Dwelling

8.3.1 Text

Psalm 132 is something of an anomaly within the collection. Much longer than any other poem, it also uses the synonymous parallelism more frequently found throughout the rest of the Psalter,\(^\text{1156}\) rather than the anadiplosis common throughout the collection. Likewise, it uses language found throughout the Psalter but nowhere else in the collection\(^\text{1157}\) and has a historical particularity foreign to the rest of the Pilgrim Psalter. Yet the thematic focus on David and Zion and the wide vocabulary connected to YHWH’s dwelling place seem appropriate for the collection and the extensive use of repetition, quotations, and changing voices makes it suitable for liturgical use.\(^\text{1158}\)

Although there has been much debate about its date and setting,\(^\text{1159}\) it is generally agreed to evoke a re-enactment of some type,\(^\text{1160}\) using performative language designed to incite action rather than merely describe past events.\(^\text{1161}\) There are a number of different voices speaking within the psalm, which suggests performative possibilities.

The psalm opens with an exclamation of petition, יוהי הוהי (v. 1), imploring YHWH to act motivated by the past.\(^\text{1162}\) That the speakers of this petition are the community is not explicitly revealed until verses 6–7. The phrase נאם לאביו יקמים (v. 2) is an example of classic synonymous parallelism, used throughout this psalm in contrast to the rest of the collection. This divine appellation first occurs in Jacob’s

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\(^\text{1156}\) See Nel, 148; Stocks, 166.

\(^\text{1157}\) For example, תושיב (52 x in the Psalter); ילוא ויהי (17 x); תושיב (54 x); אֲבֵמוֹן (23 x); זָכַרְתָּ (25 x).

\(^\text{1158}\) See Schaefer, 314; Goldingay, 544.

\(^\text{1159}\) The chronological relationship between the psalm and 2 Chron 6:41–42 is also unclear.

\(^\text{1160}\) See Mowinckel, The Psalms in Israel’s Worship, 1:115; Kraus, Psalms 60–150, 476–78; Bellinger, 124–25.


\(^\text{1162}\) See W. Schottroff, “תַּשָּׁב,” TLOT, 1:386. See also Breck Reid, 47, who believes that this psalm is performative speech rather than mere description.
blessing of Joseph, reminding hearers of YHWH’s faithfulness from Israel’s earliest history.\textsuperscript{1163}

The content of David’s vow, נֶאֶס וְאָבָא (v. 3), is introduced as first person direct discourse.\textsuperscript{1164} The focus on David not enjoying the luxuries of his “house,” בְּיָהִי (v. 3), might recall the play on David’s house and YHWH’s house in 2 Sam 7, or possibly the solemn declaration of Uriah not to enter his house in 2 Sam 11:11.\textsuperscript{1165} יְהֹוָה (v. 3) is used in parallel as a synonym for אב, but within the collection, particularly given the superscription and the use of the verb in Ps 122:4, it would have deeper resonances for those later enacting the psalm. Both terms used for YHWH’s house echo earlier theological usage: מֵאָבָא (v. 5a) is used throughout Deuteronomy for the place YHWH will choose for his Name,\textsuperscript{1166} including as the place where pilgrimage festivals will be celebrated. It is also used when the ark is settled in its location by David and Solomon respectively.\textsuperscript{1167} The word מִלאָסְתֵּנ (v. 5b) is used throughout Exodus for the tabernacle and occurs in the Samuel-Kings narratives, when YHWH replies to David about building the temple.\textsuperscript{1168}

The identification of the speakers of the psalm is held off until verse 6, when the plural group put themselves back in the position of those hearing about the ark for the first time, when it was located outside Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{1169} In verse 7, this re-imagining or re-enacting group exhort one another to go to the sanctuary to worship YHWH. The word יֵדַע (v. 7) is found seventeen times throughout the Psalter, but only here in the

\textsuperscript{1163} Gen 49:24.
\textsuperscript{1164} Hossfeld and Zenger, 461, further suggest a possible allusion to Jacob’s vow to build a sanctuary for YHWH in Gen 28:18–20.
\textsuperscript{1165} See Meier, 47.
\textsuperscript{1166} The latter suggested by Hossfeld and Zenger, 461.
\textsuperscript{1167} Deut 12:5; 11, 14, 18, 21, 26; 14:23–24; 15:20; 16:2, 7, 11, 15–16; 17:7, 10: 18:6; 26:2; 31:11.
\textsuperscript{1168} 2 Sam 6:16; 1 Kgs 8:6, 21. Cf. Fretheim, 295, who argues that the dwelling place here refers to a tent rather than to the temple.
\textsuperscript{1169} Exod 25:9; 26:1, 6, 7 et al.
\textsuperscript{1170} 2 Sam 7:6.
\textsuperscript{1171} 2 Sam 6.
collection. It indicates a ritual or liturgical gesture, suggesting this psalm speaks “live” worship rather than simply historical remembrance.

The group then turn to address יְהוָה (v. 8), imploring him to go before them to his dwelling place. The term המִשְׁמֶרֶת (v. 8) is used elsewhere for the land, thus evoking the promises יְהוָה made to his people. Verse 8 also contains the only explicit reference to the ark, יֵרֶם, not only in the collection, but in the entire Psalter. It appears that the focus of the poem is not the ark itself, but what its journey represents: יְהוָה settling on Zion. Priests were to wear special clothes, but here they are metaphorically clothed with a key characteristic of יְהוָה, qדֵס (v. 9), the orientation to good life and reputation. The plural term חֵרְרי (v. 9) appears as a name for the people of יְהוָה throughout the Psalter, although only here in the collection. The basic idea is loyalty and it can be a characteristic of יְהוָה as well as a designation for his people. The possibly onomatopoeic word נְﬠָר (v. 9) is found predominately in cultic usage, as the people respond to calls to praise. Later enactors of this psalm are doing precisely that as they speak these words.

The phrase אֶלֹהִים חָמוֹת חָמוֹת (v. 10) provides a shift from the backward-looking request in verse 1, remember, as a present pleading by the “we” group to be heeded, similar to the situation in Ps 126:4. This makes it more likely this is the beginning of a new section. יָשָׁר (v. 10) could refer to the contemporary king if the psalm was used

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1174 This verse has often been understood as indication the psalm was used for a ritual procession of the ark into Jerusalem. See Mowinckel, The Psalms in Israel’s Worship, 1:174–77; Kraus, Psalms 60–150, 475–79. Cf. Hillers.
1175 Deut 12:9; Ps 95:11.
1177 See DCH, 126.
1179 See Fretheim, 292.
pre-exile, possibly even as a prayer of the king.\textsuperscript{1183} For later enacting communities it could refer to their leader, their desire for restoration of the Davidic kingship, or even to the community itself.\textsuperscript{1184}

Paralleling verse 2a, in verse 11 the promises of \textit{YHWH} to David are poetically reimagined as a corresponding oath. This restatement of the promises provides an immediate response to the petition in verse 10. The shift from second to third person address for \textit{YHWH} could indicate a change in speaker, with an unidentified person or persons now speaking on \textit{YHWH}’s behalf. The repetition of \textit{בְּיָדוֹ} (v. 11) highlights that this is the sure response to the request in verse 10. The promise to David’s descendants comes with a clear condition in verse 12, linking it to the observation of the Sinai covenant.

Despite the other geographical references, Zion is not mentioned in the first half of the psalm. The name of the city appears to be deliberately held back to the second half, to emphasise it is the choice of \textit{YHWH} rather than of David. The verb \textit{חָנָנָא} (v. 13) is used for the physical\textsuperscript{1185} and spiritual\textsuperscript{1186} cravings and yearnings of humanity, so it is surprising to have \textit{YHWH} as the subject of such emotional desire.\textsuperscript{1187} In contrast to verses 5 and 7, which use the more theologically pregnant word \textit{ךָחַלָּה}, \textit{מָחַשֵׁב} (v. 13) is regularly used for the ordinary abodes of people.\textsuperscript{1188} It is used only here of \textit{YHWH}.\textsuperscript{1189} There appears to be deliberate contrast between the vocabulary of the people and that of \textit{YHWH}, here emphasising \textit{YHWH}’s surprising commitment to a physical location.

\textsuperscript{1184} Auwers, 552–53. See also Marttila.
\textsuperscript{1185} For example, Num 11:4; Deut 5:21; 12:20; 2 Sam 23:15; Mic 7:1: Ps 45:12; Prov 23:3.
\textsuperscript{1186} For example, 2 Sam 3:21; 1 Kgs 11:37; Isa 26:9; Amos 5:18; Prov 21:10.
\textsuperscript{1187} Apart from this verse, it is used with \textit{YHWH} as subject only in Job 23:13 where there is no definite object.
\textsuperscript{1188} For example, Gen 36:43; Exod 10:23; 12:20; Lev 13:46; 25:29; Ezek 48:15.
\textsuperscript{1189} It is used by \textit{YHWH} in Ezek 28:2 about the King of Tyre who claims to live in the dwelling of a god.
The shift to first person in verse 14 indicates the divine voice is speaking, which presents a challenge for enactors as to who should speak these words on his behalf. The noun הַיּוֹנִי is taken up by YHWH from the cry in verse 8 and the superlative יְהֹוָה from verse 12, underlining both his response to the people’s request and the fulfilment of his own promise. What was said about YHWH and his rest, רֵא (v. 14), in the previous verse is taken up in the first person by YHWH, affirming in every possible way his choice of Zion.

The relatively rare word הֵד (v. 15) can be used for food required for a journey,¹¹⁹⁰ a city’s daily supply,¹¹⁹¹ and what is needed by a raven.¹¹⁹² Thus the focus seems to be on meeting need and it here refers to the supply or stores of the whole city. The parallelism develops in the move from the supplies required by all to the poor, מַעֲנֵי (v. 15), those who have particular lack. The מַעֲנֵי are the special recipients of YHWH’s favour.¹¹⁹³ The two groups, מַעֲנֵי and חַדָּרֵי (v. 16), are repeated from verse 9, but are now identified as belonging to Zion rather than YHWH. This connection does not distance them from YHWH, however, particularly given his deep affection for Zion expressed previously.

ב (v. 17) by itself is used metaphorically for YHWH,¹¹⁹⁴ his word,¹¹⁹⁵ and even David himself.¹¹⁹⁶ The image here is the broader picture of God providing a lamp for the ruler,¹¹⁹⁷ that is, making it possible for him to continually reign by providing necessary light.¹¹⁹⁸ There could also be a play on יִבָּל, dominion.¹¹⁹⁹ The רְכִּיבָת (v. 18) of David

¹¹⁹¹ Neh 13:15.
¹¹⁹² Job 38:41.
¹¹⁹³ See, for example, Isa 14:30: 41:17; Pss 12:6; 69:34; 72:13.
¹¹⁹⁴ 2 Sam 22:29.
¹¹⁹⁵ Ps 119:105.
¹¹⁹⁶ 2 Sam 21:17.
¹¹⁹⁷ 1 Kgs 11:36.
¹¹⁹⁸ See Ps 18:29 for a similar image.
stand in for the enemies of Zion, or indeed, the enemies of whoever is participating in the petition and promise of the psalm. In contrast to Zion’s priests, the enemies are covered in shame, בוש (v. 18). The focus is on the outward state of humiliation and disempowerment rather than an internal, subjective emotion.1200 In both cases, it is YHWH’s action that causes this, not anything his people do.

8.3.2 Performance

Four psalms throughout the collection have David’s name in the title, causing enactors to imagine their words on his lips and connect the emotions of the psalm with experiences in his life. Psalm 132 contains the only mentions of David within the body of these psalms. Here, the pilgrimage community begins by calling on YHWH to remember David (v. 1), thereby invoking his name as their predecessor in the actions described, whether as the King who represents the community or as an exemplar in faith and worship. The appeal is not to David’s power or authority, but to his humility. I chose the unusual English word “abnegation” in an attempt to replicate the impact of the highly unusual form of the Hebrew verb1201 and knowing that it would be unfamiliar for audience members caused me to linger over it in performance. I felt that this slowing down enabled me to contemplate the nuances and complexities of this emotional experience and consider my own experience of entering into this unfamiliar state. This is expounded by the subsequent declarations (vv. 3, 4), which become the declarations of the enacting community as they step into David’s shoes by speaking them. The first person affirmations are preceded by the synonymous verbs “swear” and “vow,” עדן and עוד (v. 2), preparing the community to enter into this part of the enactment with an

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1201 See comments on this verse in section 3.15.2 above.
appropriate level of solemnity and sincerity. The content of the vows (vv. 3–5) is
descriptive and somewhat extreme and in performances I found myself challenged to
envisage making avowals of such self-abasement, being willing to sacrifice comfort and
rest so that YHWH might have a proper place. For the pilgrimage community the desired
place could be understood literally to refer to the temple and place of pilgrimage but it
can also be thought of metaphorically, referring to the place of YHWH within the life of
the community. The effect of the text is thus to place enactors in a position of bringing
to mind the challenges and costs involved in being together as the people of God.

The theo-logic of Psalm 132 begins predominantly with YHWH’s majesty and
power and yet this psalm too ends with an experience of intimate and engaged
relationship. YHWH is first called upon to “remember,” זכר, the vows and sacrifices of
King David (vv. 1–2), providing a picture of a relationship between the king and YHWH
in which there is giving and receiving on both sides. The king’s desire to provide a
“sanctuary,” נסוב (v. 5), for YHWH elevates YHWH as the higher king, worthy of
greater honour than even the highest ruler in the land.

The final three poems in the collection focus on concrete space or places.1202
Psalm 132 depicts the movement of the ark from outside to inside Jerusalem (vv. 6–8),
focusing enactors’ imaginative experience on the city’s role as the representation of the
centre of their communal spiritual life. Like the previous psalm, the initial verbs of
movement are negated (v. 3). Where in Psalm 131 the invitation was to speak these
words to YHWH in prayer, here the call is to imagine ourselves speaking as King David,
vowing not to partake in certain actions until the task of finding YHWH a resting place is
completed. In taking on the character of David to voice these words in my performances,
I noted that my imagination expanded on the movements named to include their
implications, not entering the house or bedroom (v. 3) standing as metonyms for the

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1202 See Prinsloo, “The Role of Space,” 458, 472, on the differences between space and place.
activities that would normally occur in those spaces. The text thus encourages enactors to imagine various aspects of daily life while concurrently imagining themselves choosing not to partake in them.

The motivation for this decision is the goal of finding a “place,” הבית (v. 5), for YHWH. When attending to this stated reason in my performances, I observed how the word “place” evoked strong connotations of home and settledness. The imagined action and reason are connected in their effect by a shared spatiality; the spaces in which the enactor is at home are sacrificed for a space in which YHWH might be at home.

The voice speaking in the psalm then changes, with those speaking taking on the voice of the people in the days of David finding the ark (v. 6). This psalm could be enacted as a dialogue with different members of the community taking on different roles. In my performances, this was done imaginatively by changing position and voice, which was enough to allow me to enter into the different emotions evoked. In contrast to the abasement of David, I felt the delight of the community discovering YHWH in their midst, exhorting one another to worship (v. 7). In the context of pilgrimage, this then functions as another invitation to continue to the central destination, where YHWH resides.

As enactors are called to take on the character of the community, kinaesthetically they “remember” their experience in specific geographic locations (v. 6). For my performances, I attempted to find substitutes for these locations that would evoke for my audiences some imaginative connections to the sense of place. Although Ephrathah might mean little to them, “the region of David” would hopefully bring to mind a general location within the land of Israel, while “the forest” could evoke ideas of a rural setting and thus distance from the city of Jerusalem. The text allows members of the community of faith who know and are anticipating the end of the story
to imagine movement from these more distant locations toward the central sanctuary, reinforcing the idea of pilgrimage.

Relationally, as enactors take on the role of the community in the days of David (v. 6), they thereby identify with subjects of a king who are witnessing that king lower himself so as to lift YHWH up. The title “Mighty One of Jacob,” ḥūy bēqoy (v. 5b), further emphasises YHWH’s power as well as evoking his historical relationship with his people. The specific geographical and historical allusions in this psalm place enactors within the wider historical community of enactors, in contrast to the personal dimension of the previous psalm. During my performances, I found entering into and embodying this psalm caused me to consider my place in the great long tradition of those who have been part of YHWH’s community before me. The text thus locates enactors within the wider story of the Hebrew Bible, noting that their relationship with YHWH is the same relationship that has been offered to and experienced by their forebears.

The community then exhort YHWH himself (v. 8), demanding that he take his rightful place amongst them. Attending to the changing directions of discourse in performance, I perceived the shift also from a tone of delight to one of respect and awe as each player in the unfolding drama – David, the community, and YHWH – takes their place. With YHWH at the centre, the subsequent requests (v. 9) can be understood as the expected consequences of this location, with leaders of the community appropriately attired for their task and the people as a whole feeling the emotional response of such great joy that it overflows into song. There is a sense of order and everyone in their rightful place that brings peace.

The text uses two verbs with spatial denotation to describe a response to the presence of YHWH, “enter,” נָדָע (v. 7a), indicating moving horizontally closer to his location and “bow down,” הָשֵׁב (v. 7b), indicating movement vertically away from the
divine presence therein. Attending to this spatiality in my performances, I noted how imagining myself simultaneously drawing closer to and lowering myself away from YHWH evoked resonances with the twin ideas of immanence and transcendence. The text thus encourages enactors to place themselves in a position of intimacy with YHWH as well as a position of submission before him. The latter is affirmed by the cry to YHWH to “arise,” מָקַם (v. 8a), another directional indicator that I found in performance led me to envisage a different spatial position, with YHWH elevated above. The goal of the psalm is a place for YHWH, described in verse 8 as his “rest,” בֵּיתוֹ. In some of my performances, “rest” aroused for me ideas of YHWH being settled and at home, whether in the temple in Jerusalem or in heaven. In one of my later performances, I also noted how this idea brought to my mind the creation story with YHWH enjoying and being pleased with creation on the seventh day. It appears, then, that the text encourages enactors to imagine YHWH in a space that is uniquely his, from which he oversees the world, is connected to it, and is accessible to his people.

The historical continuity also emphasises YHWH’s immortality in contrast with that of enactors. He has been present throughout the ages, whereas they exist within a particular time and place. I found in my performances entreating YHWH to “arise,” מָקַם (v. 8), then became an invitation for him to take his rightful place as ruler in majesty, seated high above his people. This is for YHWH’s own sake, but also has significant outcomes for his people as his righteousness is shared by the priests and his joy by all the people (v. 9).

Further references to David (vv. 10, 11) serve again to call the enacting community to remember their history and identity. Unlike the opening reference to David’s exemplary actions, here it is David’s status that is key to the imploration. Referring to him as “servant” and “anointed,” וֹסֵר לְדָוִדוֹ and מָשִׁיחַ (v. 10), focuses
enactors’ attention on the promises Y\textsc{hwh} made to David, pleading in prayer for these to be kept or renewed in their current situation. Enactors have thus far in this psalm spoken about David, as David, as the historical community, and to Y\textsc{hwh}. They next speak to one another about Y\textsc{hwh} (v. 13), reminding each other that he is truthful and faithful. In my performances, I heard my prayer being answered in the recounting of past statements of Y\textsc{hwh} by his people.

The recounting of Y\textsc{hwh}’s vows to David affirms that he is on his people’s side (v. 11), with the reciprocity of vows made between David and Y\textsc{hwh} highlighting the reciprocal nature of their relationship. In performing this psalm and taking on Y\textsc{hwh}’s voice at this point, I found myself speaking with certainty and conviction and thereby experiencing the foundation affirmed for placing trust in Y\textsc{hwh}, that is, his words are sure.

A spatial metaphor is used in the recounting of the covenant promises made by Y\textsc{hwh} to David and his descendants (v. 10). “Face,” הָנַפּ, is idiomatically used with “to,” ו, throughout the Hebrew Bible to represent the spatial location of being “before” or “in front of” another. Its use with “turning,” וְנַפֶּשׁ (v. 10), appears to be an idiom for rejection and refusal. During my performances, I observed that I visualised the idea of Y\textsc{hwh} “turning from the face” as a turning of his back, implying that although enactors and the anointed who represents them are in the presence of Y\textsc{hwh}, there is a possibility of separation in the relationship. The request is thus for a maintenance of the connections between his location and theirs. The same language of turning is immediately used for Y\textsc{hwh}’s faithfulness to the covenant (v. 11a), with the effect of negating the possibility that Y\textsc{hwh} would turn his back. The promise is made that the descendants of David, if faithful, will dwell on his throne (vv. 11–12). This is most

\textsuperscript{1203} See BDB, 816; HALOT, 940.  
\textsuperscript{1204} 1 Kgs 2:16–20; 2 Kgs 18:24; Isa 36:9; Ezek 14:6.
obviously understood as a promise to the Davidic line of kings. In my performances, however, I noted that it is possible for the community to imagine themselves as David’s descendants and the dwelling then be taken to refer to their place in the presence of YHWH.

Finally, enactors then speak as YHWH (vv. 14–18), recounting a version of his promises in the first person. Perhaps in some communities this part of the psalm was voiced by a single person – a priest – taking on the “role” of YHWH. Whether spoken by one or by all, the effect of this is to cause speakers to imagine themselves in the role of the deity and to take on his emotional perspective, an unusual experience. One audience member chose this as one thing that will stick with them from the performance:

C6: God’s use of emotion.

In my performances, I was drawn into the depth of passion YHWH has for his people as well as feeling a sense of awe and responsibility when imaginatively standing in his place. I also observed how the conditional nature of the promises can cause enactors to experience both the hopefulness of YHWH and also a sense of the potential risk; the conditional “if,” Μ, clearly implies that members of the community could let YHWH down (v. 12). Why, then, would YHWH offer so much? The next part of the psalm is an invitation into the heart of a God who desires, who longs, who feels (vv. 13, 14). Taking on the role of YHWH speaking words of desire and love to his people, I found myself in performances speaking with compassion to the audience and being surprised by the passion discovered from being in the unexpected position of expressing

1205 Although the impassibility of God was accepted as axiomatic for many years in theology, recent work on divine suffering in particular has opened up the area of studying divine emotions. See, for example, Richard Bauckham, “‘Only the Suffering God can Help’: Divine Passibility in Modern Theology,” Themelios 16 (1984): 6–12.
the feelings of YHWH. The effect of the text is to allow one to speak the emotions that belong to the creator, to discover how he is in some way moved just as we are.

The final six verses of the psalm focus on the concrete location of Jerusalem, the place of pilgrimage. Jerusalem is described in a number of ways that resonate with ideas of sacred space common among religions, but the psalm uses concrete rather than mythic language, as Clines notes is common throughout the Hebrew Bible. Zion is described as the place where YHWH chooses to “dwell,” (v. 13, 14), “rest,” (v. 14), and to engage actively with his people (vv. 15–18). In my performances, I was particularly drawn to the connection of the word “rest” (which can in my cultural context evoke ideas of stillness and ceasing work) with a number of actions: “blessing,” (v. 15a), “sating,” (v. 15b), “clothing,” (v. 16a), “growing,” (v. 17a), and “arranging,” (v. 17b). YHWH’s rest is active, he continues to work to bring blessing upon his people by providing for them. This is not the stillness of the individual in the previous psalm, but a different kind of rest, one in which YHWH continues to sustain his creation, again echoing ideas from Genesis. I also noted in my performances that this resting-activity of YHWH leads to a similar sense of resting-activity for the community. They are not striving or working – the actions of being blessed, clothed, and caused to grow are passive on their part (vv. 15–17) – and yet these images imply and include the activities of eating, gathering, singing, and flourishing. The psalm thus allows enactors to imagine themselves in YHWH’s resting place with him, enjoying his rest, which includes both a sense of ceasing from work and engaging in activity in response to his care.

1206 See David J. A. Clines, “Sacred Space, Holy Places and Suchlike,” in On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays 1967–1998 (ed. David J. A. Clines; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998): 542–554, 542–44, who lists the principal characteristics of sacred space as the differentiation of space, the giving of orientation to space, the understanding of it as a place where two worlds meet, and a place that represents or mimics creation.
The love YHWH has for the community, here represented by Zion, is explicated by the abundance of blessing promised – feeding, clothing, satisfying (vv. 15–17) – providing everything that will bring the community joy. The psalm closes with a promise of ongoing strength and flourishing for the community who have inherited the promises to David, protected from enemies and secure in the place YHWH has provided for them (vv. 17–18). I found naming the contrast with the other, who will not only feel shame but be clothed or covered in it, did not as might be expected distract me from the main focus of this psalm, but rather emphasised the specialness of being YHWH’s chosen people, close to his heart. Speaking the final English word of the psalm, “flourish” (v. 18) in one performance, I noted the open-endedness of the promises as well as connections to the earlier ideas of blessing and fertility. One effect of the text thus appears to be to reassure the pilgrimage community that life with YHWH will continue to grow and develop.

YHWH’s affection for his people is illustrated by his act of choosing Zion due to his desire, ṭānh (v. 13) for her, expressing his yearning to dwell amongst his people. One audience member chose to summarise what they think the collection teaches about God this way:

T9: God’s location in Jerusalem. That he has chosen to be “tied” to a specific concrete place.

The concluding five verses of this psalm explicate the blessings of this desired relationship for the people. Their needs will be meet (v. 15), their experience of salvation extended (v. 16), and their victory assured (vv. 17–18). YHWH is thus presented as the people’s relational partner and overseer who protects and provides for them.
For all the differences between this psalm and the rest of the collection, it provides a high point of hope and joy for the pilgrim community. YHWH is not only invited to dwell amongst his people, he longs to do so. This is what provides the foundation for pilgrimage in the first place, the God who so desires to be with us that he provides a place and is ever working to make that place all we could hope for it to be.

8.4 Psalm 133: Gathering

8.4.1 Text

The key point of this psalm is made in the opening line: communal life is a good thing. The two extended images illustrate this goodness with ideas of blessing and flowing. These appear to be novel rather than conventional metaphors, which “elucidate an obscure emotional state.” The entire poem is third person commentary or address to an audience, with no change in the direction of discourse. It can be read as a single sentence. There is some particularisation of the imagery with the mentions of Aaron and Zion, which, particularly in light of the title, makes it appropriate for liturgical usage. The generalised opening statement can be applied to any community, but the concluding specificity brings to mind the pilgrim community and its location within the collection points to an awareness of possible tensions within this setting.

The particle of mirativity, הָנַה (v. 1), opens the psalm, calling listeners to attend to its surprising message. Whereas the previous psalm focused on YHWH dwelling in Jerusalem, here it is the “dwelling,” מִיָּדָו (v. 1), of the community together that is emphasised. That this dwelling together is “good,” מִיָּדָו (v. 1), picks up previous expressions of desire for what is good throughout the collection: as a prayer for

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1208 Ibid., 18.
1209 So Schaefer, 314; Goldingay, 564.
1210 The additional Davidic title adds to this feel.
Jerusalem (Ps 122:9), a request from YHWH (Ps 125:4), a word of honour spoken upon the one who fears YHWH (Ps 128:2), and the content of blessing desired from YHWH (Ps 128:5). This experience of community provides a sense of climax to the collection.

The first of two extended similes for how good this community can be is introduced by the comparative. The adjective צְלֵס (v. 2) connotes precious and fragrant,\(^\text{1211}\) the “oil,” צֶלֶם (v. 2), being that which was used for anointing on special occasions.\(^\text{1212}\) The first description of the simile, צִדְקֵה צַל הָאָדָם (v. 2), evokes movement and abundance as oil must be poured to achieve this effect. The fragrance and shine of the oil would be seen pouring down the face.\(^\text{1213}\) The second extension of the image, צְלֵס צְלֵס (v. 2), also emphasises abundance, given the amount of oil needed to reach this far.

The second simile for the value of unity amongst the congregation\(^\text{1214}\) is another flowing liquid, דִּבֵּשׁ (v. 3). The referent of the image could be literal, suggesting the role of dew in growing crops,\(^\text{1215}\) proverbial, if Mount Hermon was known or cited for particularly heavy dew,\(^\text{1216}\) polemical, if Mount Zaphon, the dwelling-place of the Canaanite gods, is in mind,\(^\text{1217}\) imaginative, picturing an idealistic abundance,\(^\text{1218}\) or metaphorical, evoking the idea of divinely given dew.\(^\text{1219}\) It is possible the image is polyvalent, but the latter two options are most likely in the context of the collection.

\(^{1211}\) As in 2 Kgs 20:13/Isa 39:2; Song 1:3; Eccl 7:1. See BDB, 1032.

\(^{1212}\) For example, Ezek 23:41; Ps 23:5 (at banquets); Exod 30:23–31; Lev 21:10 (consecration of priests).

\(^{1213}\) LXX translates good oil as μῦρον (“perfume”) highlighting the sensuousness of the image.

\(^{1214}\) Cf. Berlin, “On the Interpretation of Psalm 133,” who argues the oil and dew are compared to one another, but not to the dwelling together of brothers, 144–45.

\(^{1215}\) See Gen 27:28; Deut 33:13, 28.

\(^{1216}\) So, for example, Marrs, “The Šyry-Hm’lwt,” 140; Schaefer, 315; and many of the more popular/devotional works on the psalm. Although Hermon is Israel’s highest mountain and receives significant snowfall, there is no geographical evidence for particularly heavy dew there. See van der Ploeg, 198–99.

\(^{1217}\) Keel, “Kultische Brüderlichkeit,” 76, n. 35.

\(^{1218}\) This would thereby parallel the “good” oil. So van der Ploeg, 199–200; Thijs Booij, “Psalm 133: ‘Behold, How Good and How Pleasant,’” Bib 83 (2002): 258–267; Doyle, 9, who suggests “semantic incoherence may be intended” as a poetic technique.

\(^{1219}\) So, for example, Hossfeld and Zenger, 481, given Mount Hermon’s association with Baal in Judg 3:3; 1 Chr 5:23. Dew and oil are similarly linked in the Ugaritic Anat text, II: 39–40, with dew coming from the gods.
The divine name occurs only at the end of the poem, acknowledging Yhwh as the source of all well-being. The statement שַׁמְיָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ הearer (v. 3) provides a theological explanation for the whole psalm, suggesting the community in view in verse 1 is indeed that gathered in Jerusalem.

8.4.2 Performance

Psalm 133 opens with a title connecting the words to David. In the unfolding performance of the collection I found that this psalm seemed to shift the focus from the role of the leader to the community as a whole, even in one performance imagining David looking out over the gathered pilgrims and making these exclamations of delight. The opening particle, “Look!” הנה (v. 1), again invites enactors to call one another to attention, to take time to notice the surprising truth about to be stated: what is truly good and pleasant, what brings about the best emotional experience possible, is their unity (v. 1).

In terms of spatial dimensions, Psalm 133 brings together the physical relationship of the community with geographical images and repeated similes involving downward movement. The psalm begins by declaring the goodness of dwelling in physical proximity as a community (v. 1). In my performances, I observed how the slightly awkward phrasing “even together,” דַּעְדוּ לָנוּ (v. 1b), caused me to pause and look directly at the audience, paying attention to how the named experience was replicated in the present situation of the community and also imagining other similar gatherings I have participated in at other times. The text thus invites enactors to consider their co-location as a community and then imagine even more members of such a community joining them, emphasising the benefits of interacting with one another in person when gathered together.
These benefits are expounded in the two extended images of “oil” and “dew,” נמרן ולחן (vv. 2, 3). Even though these are not particularly familiar images in my life experience, in my performances I attended in particular to the corporate connotations of the images and the way they connect people (pourer and “pouree”) and locations (Hermon and Zion) together. The effect of both images is to generate feelings of pleasure, abundance, and blessing. The repeated verb of movement contained within the images, “going down,” יורד (vv. 2b, 2d, 3b), enables enactors to imagine those emotions overflowing from them to others. In the context of pilgrimage, this could even be envisaged as flowing from the gathered community “up” at Jerusalem, back “down” upon their homes and families, bringing refreshing and reinvigoration just as the dew does.

This psalm focuses almost exclusively on the relationship of the community members to one another. But the two similes, “oil” and “dew,” נמרן ולחן (vv. 2a, 3a), both evoke connections with YHWH’s provision and blessing, as he is understood to be the Lord in whose name the anointing ceremony is performed as well as the creator who sends rain and dew upon the land. Thus even though he is not mentioned in verses 1–2, his presence is assumed in the background. This is heightened by the repeated use of “going down,” יורד (vv. 2b, 2d, 3b), which emphasises the source of the blessing as from above.

As each of the two similes hinges on the use of the word “to go down,” יורד, (vv. 2, 3), in my performances, I used gestures to demonstrate the movement of the oil and the dew from a higher location to a lower one. In one performance I found myself imagining the warmth of oil flowing from my head to my face and to my neck, while in all my performances the word dew evoked for me a sense of coolness and refreshment.

1220 As seen in the superscription, the verb יורד (opposite to יורד) is usually used for going “up” to Jerusalem. See, for example, 2 Sam 19:35; 1 Kgs 8:1; 12:18, 27; 14:25; 2 Kgs 2:18; 16:5; 18:17; 24:10; Isa 7:1; Ezra 1:3, 5, 11; 2:1; 7:7; Neh 7:6.
The dynamic imagery thus appears to help enactors imagine the spreading of the pleasant associations the words evoke. The literal reference to Mount Hermon (v. 3a) caused me to recall and picture my own experience of ascending that mountain. I attempted to provide something of this sense of height for enactors to imagine by using the English phrase “all the way down.” The reference to Zion also called to my mind the concrete location in Jerusalem, but even for members of enacting communities who have no actual memories of this place to draw on, the word can provide visual associations with the presence of YHWH and his promises due to their familiarity with its use in Scripture and worship. The text thus taps into both actual and metaphorical geography, enabling enactors to locate themselves imaginatively within the land of Israel and under the blessing of YHWH. The use of the word “there,” נָֽא (v. 3b), in the final line reinforces this sense of place and in light of the pilgrimage lens provided by the title, links the place or experience that is the goal of pilgrimage with the blessing of life promised.

The final line of this short poem declares that blessing not only comes from YHWH, he has commanded it (v. 3c). I was struck in my performances by the forcefulness of this word. The effect of the text is to present blessing as not only YHWH’s desire for his people, but something he orders and guarantees. These words provide assurance in the feelings evoked by the psalm. The content of such blessing is summed up in the idea of abundant life, to be enjoyed forever. In my performances, I perceived that the conclusion of this psalm was potentially the climax of the collection, particularly in anthropo-logic terms, with the community gathered together experiencing all that it means to live and flourish before God.1221

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1221 In my first performance (T) I accidentally skipped Psalm 128, however, the resonances between it and this psalm caused me to decide to include it at the end of the performance, where it functioned as a kind of recapitulation and specification of this theme.
8.5 Psalm 134: Blessing

8.5.1 Text

This short concluding psalm could be read as a single strophe and closes the collection with a bare summons to praise. It has a strong liturgical tone, although like the preceding psalm addresses the people rather than YHWH. It appears to comprise a conversation between two groups, or a “blessing exchange,” which in light of the title evokes the image of a farewell liturgy between departing pilgrims and Jerusalem priests. It thus concludes the collection with the community blessing YHWH and YHWH blessing the community, both those remaining in Jerusalem and those heading far away.

Many hymns of praise begin with a call to worship using the imperative קָרָב (v. 1) is used in this way only here and in Psalms 103–104. Given its use throughout the collection and particularly in the conclusions of this and the preceding psalm, there appears to be a deliberate connection between the summons and what is received from YHWH. The second imperative נָשָׂא (v. 2) indicates a physical gesture, used elsewhere for prayer and supplication, calling on those addressed to demonstrate their dependence upon YHWH. It is also a priestly posture for pronouncing blessing, which leads well into verse 3. The first exhortation is repeated in verse 2, as is the divine name. There is possibly some allusion to the physical posture of kneeling connected to קָרָב, given the previous mentions of standing and raising hands.

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1222 Stocks, 178.
1223 As Psalm 150 closes the Psalter with a bare summons to praise, relying on the reasons provided by earlier poems. See Brueggemann, Israel’s Praise, 155.
1224 See Alter, 464; Hossfeld and Zenger, 487; Stocks, 180.
1226 Gerstenberger, Psalms: Part II, 376.
1227 קָרָב is not found in the collection, despite its substantial use throughout the rest of the Psalter.
1228 For example, Pss 28:2; 63:5; 141:2. See F. Stolz, “מַעֲשֶׂה,” TLOT, 2:771. In the context of the collection, the verb also echoes the lifting of the eyes in Psalms 121 and 123.
1229 Lev 9:22.
1230 See BDB, 138; HALOT, 159.
The change to a singular addressee in verse 3 suggests a change in speaker. As these words correspond to the opening of the Aaronic blessing in Num 6:24, it can be surmised they are here spoken by a priest. In the context of the collection, they also offer a counterpoint to both Ps 128:5 and the lack of blessing spoken upon Israel’s enemies in Ps 129:8. For contemporary enactment, the collection thus concludes with a turn toward the community, speaking YHWH’s blessing upon them. The change in the direction of speech is affirmed by the change in directional metaphors: the priests are exhorted to lift their hands toward the sanctuary, but they now turn toward the people and offer blessing “from,” נָבָא (v. 3), Zion. Blessing comes from Zion as YHWH’s dwelling place. In the context of the collection, it can be understood as a farewell blessing to those returning from Zion to their homes elsewhere. In light of Ps 133:3, this blessing from Zion is “life.” The concluding line of the psalm, and the collection, is the formula from Pss 121:2; 124:8, נֶחֲמה לְעָמִד אַלָּמִי (v. 3), the description of YHWH as the creator and overseer of all.

8.5.2 Performance

The final psalm of the collection takes place in a specific, concrete location, “the house of YHWH,” בית יְהוָה (v. 1). That the ones directly addressed are those standing there, with the implied image of firmly planted feet, emphasises the sense of place. For many throughout history, this would immediately bring to mind the temple in Jerusalem and in some of my performances this specific geo-physical location was what I imagined. In


1232 See Hossfeld and Zenger, 486–87.

1233 Auffret, 88, suggests there might be a connection between the hands of the priests in verse 2 and the hands of the maker, further emphasising the inversion from “bless YHWH” to “may YHWH bless you.”
one particular performance at a theological college, in contrast, I found myself picturing
the pastors and church leaders present standing amongst the people of their own
congregations in their own churches, probably due to the phrase “those standing ... by
night,” הָנְתִּמֵּרֶת ... מִלָּלֶתֶת (v. 1b), linking the imagery in my mind to the priests or
leaders of the pilgrimage community. Thus although the text likely refers to a specific
location initially, the way the terms used have been applied throughout the history of
biblical interpretation allows enactors to relate this psalm to their own experience of
being in a place that serves the same function, namely, the gathering place of the people
of God together in his presence. Those addressed are then called to movement, with the
“lifting of their hands,” נֵזַעְרֵד (v 2), toward the sanctuary. In my performances, I
turned away from the audience at this point, taking on in my own body the role of the
leader performing this action and causing the focus of the entire community to be on the
exalted presence in our midst.

This concluding psalm is entirely concentrated on the idea of “blessing,” בָּלָתָם, both the blessing offered by the people (priests) to YHWH (vv. 1–2) and the blessing
given by YHWH to enactors (v. 3). Again, these twin perspectives emphasise the
mutuality of the relationship between the parties. In my performances, I noted how the
naming of YHWH’s “servants” and “house,” נַבֵּה and בֵּית (v. 1), brought specificity to
what I pictured, with both my understanding of Old Testament temple worship and my
own experiences of gathered worship within my community of faith brought to mind.
The text thus invites enactors to connect these calls to worship with their own
experience of corporate worship, highlighting its reciprocal nature as the community
seeks to bless their God even as their God pours out his blessing upon them.

This last psalm of the collection is also the least intense emotionally. I found in
my performances that I experienced it as an understated coda. Following on from the
previous psalm, it is a simple call to worship and evokes recurring feelings of being blessed. The dialogical nature suggests this brief psalm could be used as a call and response. If it is enacted by the community as a whole, there can still be an imaginative standing in the position first of the temple priests (vv. 1–2) and then of the departing pilgrim community (v. 3), which is how I performed it, with each speaking words of blessing upon one another and YHWH as the source and centre of this blessing.

The conclusion speaks of blessing coming “from,” מֵאָרֶץ (v. 3), Zion, which I interpreted by speaking it directly to the audience. This led me to turn back toward the audience, with my hands that had been lifted toward heaven now pointing downwards toward the people. This in turn caused me to picture the blessing of YHWH as something tangible that was moving from him to the gathered community and it was received as such by at least one audience member:

T3: ... a true feeling of blessing during the last psalm when you pronounced the blessing.

The movement in the text thus enables us to imagine a three-way relationship in this short psalm, with those serving YHWH moving toward and then away from him and simultaneously away from and toward the rest of the community. This dual movement can represent the dynamic of blessing flowing to YHWH from the people and to the people from YHWH. The psalm ends with the theological and spatial description of YHWH as “maker of heaven and earth,” נֹפֶל שָׁמָיִם וּנְדוֹמָר (v. 3b), repeated from Psalms 121 and 124. This repetition bookends the collection with the differentiation and interconnectedness of two spaces, there and here, the underlying tension of pilgrimage. Relationally, it once again broadens the scope to remind the community that YHWH is not only their God, but the creator God of the whole cosmos; in intimate and immanent
relationship with them as his people and yet also seated high above, ruling over all. This is the one from whom all blessing flows.

8.6 Waypoint: Pausing

Before considering the whole collection, it is appropriate to pause one last time to consider the cumulative effect of these final three psalms. Psalm 132 stands out due to its distinctive length and style as well as its historical particularity, but it begins this concluding section of the collection with a dual focus on YHWH’s dwelling place and his blessing upon his people there, both of which find echoes in the final two psalms. Together, these three psalms present a picture of YHWH dwelling with his community – and the community dwelling together with one another – in an experience of rest, abundance, and flourishing, or put another way, life in all its blessings. All three psalms emphasise the concrete location of this blessing – Jerusalem – and in light of the superscription, its particular role as the endpoint of the pilgrimage journey. By the end of the collection, YHWH and his people are in their rightful place: in right relationship with one another and with the world in which they dwell. The blessing they experience there descends and overflows, going out from where they are to wherever they might go.

8.7 Psalms 120–134: Journeying

The preceding theological interpretation, using the dialogical rhythm of text and performance, has highlighted a number of repeated features, themes, and emphases that can be seen throughout the collection. Most immediately evident is the shared superscription connecting them to worship and pilgrimage, which then reverberates throughout the text when statements are made about Jerusalem, Zion, walking, gathering, and praising YHWH. Performance of the whole collection highlighted three
particular dimensions of the text’s impact that are less prominent in reading: the affective force, whereby the text generates human emotions within enactors, the kinaesthetic influence, whereby the text evokes the imagination with respect to space and movement through the world, and the relational dynamic, whereby the text invites enactors into dialogue and intimacy with YHWH. In these final reflections on the collection as whole, insights from the conversation between text and performance are integrated to consider the overall worldmaking effect of the Pilgrim Psalter in terms of its anthropo-logic, cosmo-logic, and theo-logic.

8.7.1 Anthropo-logic

One impact of the shared superscription on the Psalms of Ascents is that readers and enactors are invited to understand themselves as pilgrims. The wealth of imagery throughout the collection connected to the human body highlights that this is an embodied experience, grounded in the everyday experience of individuals. This includes, in particular, references to the hands and feet, through which individuals engage kinaesthetically and thereby make sense of the world, and to the eyes and ears, through which other members of the community along with YHWH are encountered and relationships formed and deepened. The human life, the מִנַּה, of the pilgrim includes all the totality of its constituent parts – physical, emotional, and spiritual.

The range of experiences described and implied within the collection brings together family, social, political, economic, and religious realities. Human life is integrated; there is no demarcation between different “realms” of life. The images referring to family, household, and agriculture provide associations between the text and the daily life of those participating in it. There are also many expressions of worship and prayer throughout the collection. There is no sacred/secular divide; blessing is
found both in participating in the worshipping community in Jerusalem and in ordinary family life.

In nearly every psalm in the collection there are shifts between different speakers and different addressees, reinforcing their corporate nature and providing powerful possibilities for performative interpretations. To be a pilgrim is to be a member of the pilgrim community. There is also a clear contrast presented between the community speaking the psalms and those outside the community, portrayed as enemies. This contrast has the effect of solidifying the identity and corporate experience of the enacting community. The anthropo-logic of the collection is corporate in nature, understanding humans not primarily as individuals but as members of communities.

The overall affective impact of the collection is to provide enactors with a robust experience of a broad range of emotions. From distress to contentment, fear to celebration, humility to pride, solidarity to Schadenfreude, grief to joy, anger to penitence, abasement to relief, awe to pleasure, abandonment to blessedness, enactors are invited to participate in the multiform and complex nature of human emotional experience. These emotions are linked to and felt in response to themes including relationship with YHWH, isolation from and connection with the community of faith, identification with the historical community of faith, and deliverance from and vengeance upon enemies. The collection provides enactors with a wide emotional vocabulary, inviting them to participate in experiencing feelings that could be new or unexpected, or “old” and familiar. In this way, the collection’s anthropo-logic includes an invitation to experience and appropriate the range and movement of an emotional journey. The effect of the text is not to provide an explanation, but an experience of what it means to be human and in so doing it shapes our understanding of living in relationship with and response to YHWH.
8.7.2 Cosmo-logic

The collection as a whole describes a number of contrasting spaces – private and public, above and below, near and far, inside and outside, at centre and off centre – and enactors are invited to imagine themselves and others located in or moving between these spaces. The communal dimension of many of these spaces becomes significant for experiencing and understanding the interplay between the anthropo-logic and cosmo-logic of the text. The world of the pilgrimage community is a world of journey and movement, a world of choices and possibilities.

YHWH is depicted as both present in and separate from the spaces occupied by his people, inviting them to imagine themselves relating to him both in immanence and transcendence. YHWH is also repeatedly referred to as the maker of all space, explicitly naming the world for pilgrims as that which is created and ruled by their God. Although the world can present dangers or threats, YHWH’s place above it means that pilgrims can enter into the world with confidence rather than retreat from it.

These psalms contain a high frequency of specific mentions of the names of YHWH, Jerusalem, Zion, and Israel, grounding them in the historical world of the people of God, but also inviting contemporary enactors to imagine themselves in that world and draw analogies to their own experience. References to geophysical locations can evoke intertextual and historical resonances as enactors visualise themselves participating in these storied places. The presence of geographical imagery in general also means that the text allows enactors to connect with their own concrete as well as imagined surroundings as they use the Psalms of Ascents and as they make their own way through the world.
What can seem to the reader to be mere prepositional phrases in the written text – to, from, out of, upon, and so forth – in performance become clear directional markers that enhance the imaginative experience of seeing and living in the world the text describes. The use of body imagery – mouth, lips, voice, eye, ear, face, back, hand, and foot – provides a kinaesthetic experience for enactors who subconsciously connect these images with their own bodies and thereby enter into the physical world of the text in an imaginative way. The term kinaesthesia – the idea of walking through the world, a sensory experience that provides a way of learning about and making sense of the world the text describes – is apt. The world of the pilgrim is a world experienced and made sense of by walking it and enactors of these texts can make sense of their cosmo-logic by imaginatively engaging in a metaphorical “walking through” the world they envisage.

8.7.3 Theo-logic

There is a recurrent sense within the collection of the community speaking these psalms in the present alongside a previous history of relationship with YHWH assumed and referred to as the basis for this action. This involves numerous cries to YHWH for intervention, as well as declarations about his character and activity. The effect of this is to place enactors in relationship with YHWH and invite them to reflect on the way who he is works out in their own lives. The theo-logic of the text is thus not taught so much as experienced.

Words that noticeably recur throughout the collection include peace, blessing, guarding, dwelling, goodness, all of which are associated with the benefits of relationship with YHWH and his community. Being in relationship with YHWH is presented as the source of all that is favourable and
beneficial in life. This is not offered as motivation for relationship with YHWH but as the outcome of this relationship for the community.

YHWH’s place in the universe is affirmed by the repeated appellation “maker of heaven and earth,” as well as unique descriptors including “the one dwelling in heaven,” the one who “does not slumber or sleep,” and the one who “has done great things.” This positioning of YHWH undercuts the claims of any other gods and exalts him alone as sovereign. At the same time, YHWH’s personal relationship with his people is highlighted by the use of first person pronouns: “our God,” “my Lord.” This intimacy with the community of faith reaches a climax in the final three psalms of the collection, with YHWH’s great desire to dwell amongst his people expressed (Ps 132) and then experienced (Pss 133 and 134).

The character of YHWH is implied throughout the collection: his presence, availability, love, care, and blessing for his people are assumed and relied upon. Ps 121:8 makes explicit what is implicit and foundational throughout the collection, that YHWH’s concern and care extends to his people at all times and in all situations. Explicit statements of divine attributes, while scarcer than elsewhere in the Psalter, are found at key turning points the collection. Statements about YHWH’s righteousness,(filters) faithful love, forgiveness, and redemption, stand out as key descriptors of his character and connect the Pilgrim Psalter to similar statements about YHWH’s character found throughout the Hebrew Bible.

Although there is less direct imagery about YHWH in the collection than in the Psalter as a whole, there are some images used for the community from which metaphors of who he is can be inferred. They are like a child therefore YHWH is a mother. They are like Mount Zion therefore YHWH is the foundation of the earth. They could receive arrows as judgment therefore YHWH is a warrior. They are servants
therefore YHWH is their master. They have escaped from a trap therefore YHWH is their rescuer. Such unstated metaphors allow readers and enactors to draw connections based on their own underlying experience and understanding and serve as a further invitation to engage in the relational dimensions of these experiences for themselves.

The collection as a whole invites enactors into a conversation with and about YHWH through which his character and attributes are revealed. This serves to render a profile of God that is full-bodied and multifaceted, affirming orthodox theological understandings from throughout the Scriptures while highlighting certain dynamics. As the text’s theo–logic unfolds, YHWH is revealed to be faithful, omnipresent, sovereign, just, majestic, righteous, great, consistent, forgiving, loving, redeeming, powerful, majestic, and immortal. His actions present him as saviour, deliverer, judge, helper, creator, protector, guardian, master, rescuer, worker, provider, giver, blesser, punisher, redeemer, nurturer, carer, king, and lord. He is present with his people and yet there is an invitation to experience more of him as they walk the journey with and toward him. He is near them and with them, yet above them and awaiting them. He yearns to dwell with them even as they make their way closer to him. The relationship enactors are invited into is thus reciprocal and responsive as they discover and understand YHWH not by learning about him but by engaging relationally with him.

8.8 Conclusions: Worldmaking

Based on a close reading of the Pilgrim Psalter and the theological features embedded within it and adopting an approach that focuses on the nature of the text, in particular its canonical framing and its performative intention, Part C of this thesis has explored key theological ideas in the Psalms of Ascents – what they say as a collection about humanity, the world, and God – and their effect on enactors. It has sought to move
beyond describing what these psalms say, to outlining their effects and the difference they make in the life of the community of faith. The descriptor “worldmaking” articulates the idea that these psalms reconstruct the reality of those who engage with them. I am also drawn to this term because it evokes the notion that the effect of the psalms is transformative rather than merely cognitive and because it aligns well with the idea of enactment. In this concluding reflection on the Psalms of Ascents, therefore, I intend to articulate the ways in which the Pilgrim Psalter reshapes the world for its enactors. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate its particular contribution to the life of the community of faith.

These psalms seek to redefine our identity. Enactors of the Psalms of Ascents understand themselves to be pilgrims, or better, members of a pilgrimage community. Although the pilgrim may begin the journey alone, the experience as a whole is inherently corporate as we are drawn into community along the way and drawn toward a flourishing expression of that community as part of the goal. Joining in the pilgrimage is a choice, as those who are outsiders to the community of faith are not viewed as pilgrims. Pilgrims are on a journey, but it is not a simple or linear path. Along the way, there is a broad range of possibilities and a full range of experiences of life and relationships, resulting in emotional highs and lows. There is, moreover, a sense of forward motion even throughout the ups and downs of life. Being a pilgrim means seeking rather than being comfortable, continually looking to and for something more. It also means having a destination in mind, anticipating that there is something yet to come and to be.

These psalms seek to reconstruct our engagement with the world. Enactors of the Psalms of Ascents see the world as a place of journey, allowing ideas of the centre and the margins, here and there, to shape the way they occupy and interact with the
world. Place matters on a pilgrimage: the places left behind, the path, and the destination. Our location within place also matters: knowing where we have come from, where we are now, and where we are going. Being on the move between places, pilgrims know that they make sense of the world not by studying it, but by stepping out into it. The world of the pilgrim is not a fixed world, but one that is open and one that demands engagement.

These psalms seek to reframe our relationship with God. Enactors of the Psalms of Ascents trust in a God who is both known and continuing to reveal more of himself. He is the maker of all that is and the one who calls the community into the journey of pilgrimage. He is present in every part of the journey, guiding and walking with us, willing to listen to our cries, and drawing us ever onwards. He desires and longs for us to dwell with him and as pilgrims we are called to believe that he has even more of himself to offer as we move onwards. In undertaking this thesis, I had hoped to conclude with a metaphor for God that captures the dynamic of relating to him as pilgrims. Is he our Guide, or our Map, or our Destination, or our Home? But the Psalms of Ascents, like the whole of Scripture, do not present us with a God who can be so easily contained in one image alone. Each of these metaphors captures something of YHWH’s role in the pilgrimage and yet each has limitations. It seems best then to leave this as another unstated metaphor, allowing the community of faith to experience what it means for YHWH to be their God throughout the pilgrimage. The Pilgrim Psalter presents us with a God who protects, rescues, guards, loves, redeems, judges, directs, blesses, and above all desires to be in relationship with his pilgrim community every step of their journey, both their goings in and their comings out, from now and until forever.
Chapter 9: Conclusions

9.1 Review

This study began by identifying the gaps in previous research including the theological significance of the canonical superscription shared by Psalms 120–134 and its performative nature. A great deal of work has been done previously to explain the coherence and nature of the Psalms of Ascents. This thesis has built on and contributed to this wider body of knowledge by investigating some particular dimensions of their effect on those who use them. Prinsloo and Gillmayr-Bucher have examined the area of spatiality from a more structural and external perspective. By internalising and entering into the text for performance, this spatiality was here experienced in a different way and the kinaesthetic nature of how it unfolds discovered. The relational and emotional dimensions of the collection have been mentioned by numerous scholars but not previously explored in such a sustained way.

A broad consensus amongst scholars about the connection of the superscription to pilgrimage was also recognised. The integration of a canonical-theological perspective, taking the superscription seriously as a theological frame for reading, has highlighted its significant contribution to the effects of the collection. The number of popular treatments of Psalms 120–134 that use pilgrimage as an interpretive frame suggests that this theological effect has been intuitively recognised by many who read these psalms. Application of the theoretical framework of Christopher Seitz to the collection has provided a more robust theological foundation for this approach. Pilgrimage operates as a metaphor for life and faith. The superscription means that the Psalms of Ascents are read through a pilgrimage lens and when used by a community that self-identifies as a pilgrim people, the collection becomes a significant force for shaping and structuring the understanding of that metaphor.
This thesis has also produced an original translation of Psalms 120–134 from the Hebrew text, paying careful attention to grammar, form, syntax, and tense, as well as to performative, poetic, and aural dimensions of the text in order to express faithfully not only the words, but also the power, surprise, and effect of these Scriptures. Furthermore, the translation approached these fifteen psalms as a collection, maintaining consistency in vocabulary and accentuating distinctive and repeated features throughout, so that they can be appreciated and entered into as a canonical whole.

An innovative component of this thesis has been the incorporation of the author’s own memorisation and performance of the text, as well as analysis of audience responses to the performances, as part of the interpretive process. These have provided a significant enrichment to the understanding of the theological trajectory of the Psalms of Ascents, proposing that this is a theology designed to be entered into and experienced, or “enacted.” This thesis has thus made a unique contribution to the study of the Psalms by bringing together two emerging approaches in biblical interpretation – biblical performance criticism and theological interpretation of Scripture – for the first time. Performance criticism has often been employed as an end in and of itself, either to discover performative features within texts or to discern ancient performances behind texts. Here it has been creatively used as a method of research to enrich a theological interpretation. Bringing these two areas of study together has accentuated the commonalities and overlaps in the approaches. In particular, both focus on the community rather than the individual, on examining the effect of the text rather than describing what it says, and on the goal of transformation. This thesis has also responded to a key criticism of both theological interpretation of Scripture and biblical performance criticism – that they have too often focused on talking about what the
methodologies might offer rather than demonstrating how they can be applied in practice – by offering a model of their application to the Psalms of Ascents.

This study has gone further than other biblical performance based research projects by incorporating insights from audience research as part of the project. This research affirmed that the key effects of the text experienced in performance are similar for both performer and audience. Furthermore, it suggested that contemporary communities of faith might expect their engagement with the biblical text to be primarily cognitive and therefore not immediately realise the significant theological impact that engagement with their emotions and imaginations can have. This study also clarified some of the limitations of this type of research in biblical studies. In particular, it highlighted the nature of the Psalms as community documents and suggested their intended usage includes corporate enactment. This suggests that there is scope for future research into how the Psalms are internalised and enacted by communities of faith.

9.2 Looking forward

This thesis has critically explored the theological perspectives of the Psalms of Ascents (Pss 120–134), the Pilgrim Psalter, along three corresponding dimensions: their emotional, kinaesthetic, and relational effects. What has emerged from this study is aptly termed a “pilgrim theology,” as taking the performative nature of the collection along with its superscription seriously has demonstrated that those who enact these psalms find their identity as pilgrims redefined, their engagement with the world as a place of journey reconstructed, and their relationship with a dynamic and multidimensional God reframed, so that the effect of the Pilgrim Psalter is, to use Walter Brueggemann’s term, “worldmaking.”
The Pilgrim Psalter redefines the community’s identity as pilgrims, reconstructs the community’s engagement with the world as a place of pilgrimage, and reframes the community’s relationship with the God who is guide, destination, and so much more. In this study, the Pilgrim Psalter has been experienced as a pilgrimage itself. It is a pilgrimage that needs to be repeated and re-enacted by communities of faith in their own ways, as they allow the pilgrim theology of the collection to reshape and reconstruct the way they live as pilgrim people, or to be truly worldmaking.

The Psalms are particularly amenable to the approaches taken in this thesis due to their liturgical intentionality and theological richness. The emerging discipline of biblical performance criticism has not yet been widely applied to Old Testament texts, yet the poetry of the Old Testament provides a rich resource for further performance studies. The work done here also suggests that there is scope for these methodologies to be applied to other biblical texts as a way to enter into the world of the Scriptures and to consider its effects on readers, hearers, and enactors. This thesis also highlights the value of embodiment and enactment for opening up new dimensions of theological interpretation. The use of biblical performance criticism to supplement other types of biblical interpretation might offer further insights. In a world that is increasingly digital and multiform, approaches that are not purely text-based offer fresh possibilities for contemporary engagement with ancient texts. For these texts are not simply historical artefacts locked forever in the past, but are carriers of the divine word, a word with the potential to remake the world for those communities who dare to enter deeply into their transformative power.

*Like the dew of Hermon,*

*which goes all the way down upon the mountains of Zion.*
For there YHWH has commanded the blessing:

life until forever.

Psalm 133:3
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Appendix 1: Performance details and survey questions

Performance venues and dates:
Four performances of the Psalms of Ascents were presented to audiences, who then participated in discussion groups and filled in survey forms. Details of the performances were as follows:

R. Richmond Baptist Church, 141 Richmond Road, Richmond, South Australia. Thursday 17 September 2015.

T. Tabor College, 181 Goodwood Road, Millswood, South Australia. Tuesday 22 September 2015.

C. Canberra Baptist Church, 11 Currie Crescent, Kingston, Australian Capital Territory. Sunday 4 October 2015.

M. St Mark’s Theological Centre, 15 Blackall St, Barton, Australian Capital Territory. Wednesday 7 October 2015.

Audience post-performance small-group discussion questions:

a. What did you experience during the performance?
b. What will stick with you from the performance?
c. What did the performance help you notice about the text (Psalms 120–134)?
d. What emotions did the performance convey or make you feel about the text (Psalms 120–134)?
Audience member post-performance survey questions:

a. What will stick with you from the performance?

b. What did the performance help you notice about the text (Psalms 120–134)?

c. What emotions did the performance convey or make you feel about the text (Psalms 120–134)?

d. Do you think the tone, movement, expression or other features used in the performance helped you understand the text better? In what ways?

e. What do you think are the differences between hearing the biblical text performed in this way and reading it for yourself?

f. Why do you think these biblical texts (Psalms 120–134) have been given the title “Songs of Ascents” or “Pilgrimage Psalms”?

g. What would you say these biblical texts (Psalms 120–134) teach us about what it means to be human?

h. What would you say these biblical texts (Psalms 120–134) teach us about the world we live in?

i. What would you say these biblical texts (Psalms 120–134) teach us about God?
Appendix 2: Video of performance and survey responses

Permission was obtained from the Charles Sturt University Research Advisory Committee to include the following digital appendices:

a. Video file showing one of the performances (Canberra Baptist Church).
   Although the primary focus of the thesis is what was learned from preparing for and undertaking performances, the video is made available to aid readers in understanding and appreciating the methodology of performance and its impact.

b. PDF file containing the audience survey responses. The audience research undertaken was supplemental and provided confirmation of the insights gained from the performance research. The raw data is made available for readers to access if desired.