

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 ACTUALITY AND RESEARCH PROBLEM

Christianity among the *Pedi* tribe has led to widespread use of Christian music that has interfered with the performance, format and role of traditional *Pedi* psalm-like songs (Blume 1979:8, 13; Foley 1987:407; Leaver 2001a:366). The intervention of Christian missionaries in the *Pedi* community resulted in some *Pedi* people observing the hymns introduced by the missionaries and forgetting about their indigenous songs (Moila 1988:111ff; 152ff; 189ff). In some extreme cases, there has been total replacement of the *Pedi* psalm-like songs with Christian hymns and gospel music<sup>1</sup>. This has been due to devaluation of African culture by some early church missionaries, and perpetuated by younger *Pedi* Christians.

For many years, scholarly research on psalms have concentrated mainly on the psalms as documented in the Bible and their parallels in the ancient Near East (Hallo and Younger 1997:538). Scholarly works have centered on the nature, function, use, structure and the origin of these psalms (see Eaton 1967; Dahood 1970; Kuntz 1974; Hayes 1976; Kraus 1979; Brueggemann 1984; Gunkel 1985; Gerstenberger 1988; Day 1990; Anderson 1991; Craven 1992; Brueggemann 1995; Crenshaw 2001; Gerstenberger 2001; Brueggemann 2002; Terrien

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<sup>1</sup> Aleaz (2003:107) emphasizes that the Christian churches continue to manifest their colonial heritage today in different ways: in the style and functioning of their bureaucracy; in the shape of their worship; in the language and content of their theology; and in the way in which all these are tightly controlled by a central authority, European in its mentality, that allows little local autonomy and is insensitive to local needs.

2003; Goldingay 2006 and others)<sup>2</sup>. So far, however, it appears that biblical scholars or scholars of religion have given little attention to the psalm-like texts in African culture(s) or that they are unaware of their existence and ignorant of their purpose and function (Adamo 2001:2-3). Yet, there are and have been many psalm-like songs in African culture(s) (Mbiti 1975; Kebede 1982; Zake 1986; Arnston 1998; Cooke 2000; Phibion 2003; Soko 2003; Idamoyibo 2005; Wanyama 2005). This study will produce evidence of this.

There is a need for in-depth research on the nature, forms, uses, roles and contexts of psalm-like texts in African cultures, and a comparison between these and the Old Testament psalms. Such an investigation in the *Pedi* tradition has hitherto not been attempted. This study is meant as a contribution to the provisioning of perspectives on African psalm-like songs when comparing to the religion of ancient Israel. Above all there is a need to provide access to the African psalm-like texts to researchers and scholars of theology and religion, in this instance the *Pedi* culture.

This study would be a contribution towards the wealth and value of indigenous knowledge systems in Africa, specifically the *Pedi* culture in South Africa.

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<sup>2</sup> Mowinckel (1962); Weiser (1962); Murphy (1963); Leupold (1969); Anderson (1972); Childs (1976); Westermann (1980); Smith (1984); Hurvitz (1988); Longman (1988); Stuhlmüller (1989); Seybold (1990); Murphy (1993); Pleins (1993); Mays (1994); Eaton (1995); Whybray (1995).

## **1.2 NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL VALUE**

### **1.2.1 National importance**

Documentation and dissemination of the activities of the *Sekhukhune Contradosa*<sup>3</sup> is of importance to enable the retention of the *Pedi* cultural heritage. One cannot understand culture without reference to subjective meaning and one cannot understand it without reference to social structural constraints. Furthermore, culture is a historically created system of explicit and implicit designs for living, which tend to be shared by all or, especially, designated members of a group at a specific point in time (Balasuriya 2002:93).

Exposure to the *Sekhukhune Contradosa's* activities can lead to proper assessment, aesthetic appreciation and a clear understanding of the *Pedi* indigenous psalm-like texts. Such exposure could lead to more research interest by national scholars, which therefore motivates the *Sekhukhune Contradosa* to engage in more productive religious and cultural activities.

Research attention and interest in the activities of *Sekhukhune Contradosa* will encourage the traditional African practitioners psychologically and creatively. Such research studies could enable the re-assessment of pre-conceptions and prejudices that may have surrounded the contextual African approaches to theology and religion. It will lead to an enhanced interaction and utilization of the benefits of the activities.

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<sup>3</sup> *CONTRADOSA* refers to Congress of Traditional Doctors of South Africa.

### 1.2.2 International importance

This study will enable scholars internationally to become aware of the existence of psalm-like texts in African culture(s). The research also document some indigenous songs as a contribution to the development of the African cultural heritage, but also offer interested researchers and scholars the opportunity to carry out further research on psalm-like texts in African culture(s). Aleaz (2003:107) has reported that indigenisation today is well rooted in the Bible as parts of the Bible are actual “models” of indigenisation. He argues that the Old Testament and the New Testament should be taken as models of indigenisation, not only in the matters of religious customs, practices, and expressions of faith, but also in literary forms and religious writings (Aleaz 2003:108).

Literary documentation as well as an analytical study of the content and structures of African (*Pedi*) songs will enable proper focusing on the potential and value of African (*Pedi*) psalm-like texts. This at once elicits discussions and cognitive attention that would necessitate both historical and contemporary understanding of the biblical psalms. Such literary attention will not only coerce congruent knowledge of the psalms, but will, in addition, create much needed balance between the study of the hitherto untouched African (*Pedi*) psalm-like texts and the already well-researched biblical psalms. In other words, as more scholars focus on the study and understanding of the nature and forms of African texts, a balance in the historical research of African and other biblical psalms will be this researcher’s intention. Furthermore, international exposure to the *Sekhukhune Contradosa* could also lead

to international interest and assessment of African religious cultures and heritage (Nurnberger 2007:152).

### 1.3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Since the Book of Psalms in the Old Testament has not been subjected to a comparative evaluation/analysis with *Pedi* psalm-like songs, the objectives of the study, therefore, will be to:

- 1) provide a descriptive assessment of the types of Old Testament psalms and their religious function(s);
- 2) provide a descriptive assessment of different types of *Pedi* psalm-like songs and their religious function(s);
- 3) compare these two literary traditions with regard to similarities and differences in their nature, content and function(s);
- 4) contribute to the development of African *Pedi* cultural heritage, especially the *Pedi* culture, by documenting and translating indigenous texts into for coming generations and further study. for future reference; and to
- 5) document the oral heritage of *Pedi* psalm-like texts to preserve it

## 1.4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### 1.4.1 Introduction

This research is primarily a literature study based on primary oral traditions and secondary literature. In order to situate the study theoretically and generate the conceptual framework, secondary data

was consulted and assessed. Secondary evidence included written sources like books, journal articles, articles, MA and PhD theses, etc. Available online journals on internet were also consulted.

Due to the oral character and scope of the African context the literature aspect is complemented by field research conducted through interviews, observation and recording (Du Toit 1998:308). It is further argued that songs and dancing, rites and ceremonies, among others, are vital repositories of African religious cultural experiences (Awolalu 1991:131). To that end the foregoing elements particularly songs are harnessed for the purposes of this research. Thus recordings on audiocassettes and videotapes captured group performances on *Pedi* psalm-like songs (see CD in the addendum). Here the information on audiotapes and videotapes was translated into English. Collected *Pedi* psalm-like songs were classified and assessed according to their function(s). This was done by counterchecking, comparing, contrasting and corroborating the collected information from various sources together with the outlined theoretical framework, research questions, hypothesis and objectives.

#### 1.4.2 Theoretical framework

Arguments about models of interpreting the Bible in an African context have been rehearsed by commentators such as Mugambi (1994), West (1999), Adamo (2001), Ukpong (2002) and others<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> In South Africa Paton (1996) proposes a liberationist approach of conducting hermeneutics. He is supported by Boesak (1984) who employed biblical texts to resist apartheid.

Mugambi (1994:9-16) approaches theologizing in Africa from two perspectives, which are mutually dependent. Firstly, he suggests the collection of data about African societies. This matter of fact means fresh studies concerning various religions and cultural systems must be embarked on. Secondly and, consequently, the results from the foregoing investigations should be used in biblical interpretation and theologizing. Mugambi's call echoes Agbeti (1972:6-7) and has been undertaken at various levels in African studies and theology. Increasingly the need for authenticity is motivating such studies. The present research complies with this endeavor since *Pedi* indigenous songs are collected and comparatively assessed against similar Psalm texts herein.

West (1999:9-19) for example, suggests a method of performing biblical interpretation which draws on liberation theology's<sup>5</sup> commitment to the poor. The South African context is ideal for the method since the consequence of the historical past has left the ordinary people poor and marginalized. This model is employed in Bible study with the ordinary reader. West's method is grounded in the South African context. The method employs the approach by ordinary readers. Ordinary readers are the poor, marginalized, illiterate or semi-illiterate who are mostly found in the rural areas. The interface between the ordinary readers and an academic facilitator brings both the cultural context of the ordinary reader and the critical tools of the facilitator into discussion.

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<sup>5</sup> According to Martey (2003:128-129) African liberation theology sets Africa's socio-economic and political struggle within a theological context. He further insists that it defines poverty in anthropological terms and draws attention to all structures - political, economic, ecclesial, religious - that dehumanize and impoverish the African created in the image of God.

West's approach enriches Biblical and Religious Studies in Africa as it bridges the gap between previously marginalized communities and western scholarship. Through interface academically qualified facilitators, are able to conduct Bible study with illiterate and semiliterate faith communities. West's model employs the South African context as its point of departure.

Adamo's (2001:3-4) model is an extension of the interpretation practice common to African indigenous churches in Nigeria. This method engages in the African worldview, culture and life experience as a vantage point for the interpretation of the Bible (Ukpong 1995:5). It is a contextual approach designed in protestation against western approaches. Adamo aims at appraising biblical and African cultural and religious experience (Yorke 1997:145-158). African cultural hermeneutics is premised by an acknowledgement that the Bible is God's word. It possesses potent words approximated to African traditions (Adamo 2004:29). Furthermore, practitioners of this methodology must be experienced in African culture. Commitment to the Bible as God's word, God's ability to perform miracles and experience in African culture are essential pre-requisites for utilizing Adamo's approach.

However, Adamo's approach lacks due consideration of the contextual differences between the Bible and African traditional religions (Adamo 2001:8-35). In his reading Adamo transfers African religious concepts into the Bible. Thus, he fails to raise the religious cultural differences which have a bearing on the definitions of the concepts. For instance, Adamo applies psalm texts for healing from an African traditional religious point of view (Adamo 2001:18-24). A closer examination of



the Psalms yields no attestation to such applications and the Psalms, like the Old Testament Yahweh-faith, appear to be distanced from such magical practices.

Ukpong (2002) proposes inculturation as a method of conducting African hermeneutics. The major components of this model are the interpreter and the text. Ukpong (1995:50) argues for an in-depth analysis of the historical and cultural elements behind the text. After a meticulous analysis of the textual and interpreters' contexts the process of actualizing the biblical message in real life situations is carried out.

Ukpong's model has strengths of being contextual and interrogating relevant questions challenging African people. Moreover, it is complemented by scientific hermeneutical aspects regarding historical cultural context of biblical texts. Hereby a superficial reading of biblical texts is avoided. Further, since this approach interacts with historical cultural contexts it can easily be adapted to different African environments.

The above four models of Mugambi (1994), West (1999), Adamo (2001) and Ukpong (2002) have post-colonial reclamation tendencies. In a post-colonial approach we have the element of scrutiny of biblical documents for colonial themes. Secondly, it seeks to resist oppressive historical characteristics of the past. The post-colonial approach is meta-cultural, hence it promotes research into previously marginalized societies, like the African society in particular in order to reaffirm their cultural elements. For instance, West's model opposes the imbalances

caused by the apartheid<sup>6</sup> past of the South African history. Adamo (2001:44-45) on the other hand seeks to destabilize the hegemony of western approaches while at the same time re-appraise religious cultural systems. Mugambi's (1994:13-14) proposal to collect religious cultural data affirms the importance of religious indigenous systems. He promotes a method of interpretation that challenges and seeks redress of the conditions caused by the colonial past in Africa. For example, the consequences of colonialism in African states includes problems of economical nature (Mugambi 1994:14).

Ukpong (1995:5) like Adamo (2001:3-4), seeks to destabilize the hegemony of western approaches, while at the same time he re-appraises African religious cultural systems (Yorke 1995:145-158). This is supported by an in-depth analysis of the historical context of the text in Ukpong's approach (Ukpong 1995:3-13). Equally while the two foreground their methods in the African context, Ukpong includes economic and political elements.

Classical liberation theology is an attempt to address economical imbalances (Sugirtharajah 2001:206-215). Other aspects of the liberation hermeneutics include appraising the Bible as well as the belief in the plurality of application of the biblical message. Liberationist hermeneutics utilizes Western exegetical methods to attend to the problems of economic deprivation (Bosch 1991:439; Sugirtharajah 2001:250).

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<sup>6</sup> Apartheid has been described generally as "an Afrikaans term coined as an election slogan for the Afrikaner-led National Party that won the 1948 general election in South Africa" (Pato 2003:7). Pato emphasizes that the word apartheid comes from two Afrikaans words, *apart*, meaning "separate," and *heid*, meaning "ness," and implies racial segregation in all spheres of life.

Similarly, the tendency of West to use and support the ordinary reader in his method is drawn from liberationist interpretations (West 1999:124; Sugirtharajah 2001:206-207). In the same way Adamo employs a liberationist concept of the sacredness of the Bible (Bosch 1991:439; Adamo 2004:29).

This study is enriched by a post-colonial argument that biblical traditions need to be positioned with other religious traditions. My study interrogates the hypothesis that even though specifics of structure and content of biblical psalms and *Pedi* psalm-like songs may differ, both traditions mediate religious experience of believers and enhance the worship of the divine.

In the light of the above models, this study has adopted a comparative approach based on Fiagbezi's ethno-musicological theoretical framework (see figure 1.5.3). Equally this research draws from inculturation hermeneutics' emphasis and reappraise of indigenous cultural systems (Adamo 2001:45; Ukpong 2002:18)<sup>7</sup>. While inculturation is nuanced variously in different parts of the Third World, Fabella (2003:105) is of the opinion that it addresses the following concerns: first, culture is seen as comprehensive, taking into account the tension between the influences of modernity and Westernization on the peoples' culture as well as the traditional ways of life; second, as a dialogical process, inculturation takes into account the anti-life components in both the local culture and the biblical gospel (e.g. its patriarchal orientation), which must be critiqued and transformed. In this sense, Fabella (2003:105) insists that inculturation is liberative. Third, today inculturation is mainly the responsibility of the local

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<sup>7</sup> Inculturation hermeneutics takes its cue from the methodology of Third World theology (Torres and Fabella 1987:269-271).

community and evangelizers, not of expatriate missionaries or of local experts alone. Fourth, inculturation is an ongoing process since culture is dynamic and continually evolves. Fifth, inculturation cannot be so local that the faith is no longer recognizable by others within the communion of churches in general. Sixth, the Holy Spirit has an essential role in the work of inculturation<sup>8</sup>. Since this study is conducted in Biblical and Religious Studies, I have elected to commence with the descriptive analysis of biblical psalms then followed by *Pedi* psalm-like texts. This approach does not necessarily mean that *Pedi* culture in general and *Pedi* psalm-like texts in particular are less important than the study of the biblical tradition. But rather this approach enables the researcher to move from a well researched study field to a study field with a shorter research history, in many ways from the known to the unknown, from experienced to the less experienced research field.

In approximation to the present study other scholars have employed a comparative model between African religious experience and the Old Testament. Included under this approach are Schapera (1982), Steiner (1982), Ukpong (1990), Kamuwanga (2007). Kamuwanga (2007) has examined prayer for protection among Lozi people of Western Zambia. Like this study his model is a construct of synchronic and diachronic elements. Further similarities are noticeable in the area of appraising and advancing indigenous knowledge systems. His integrated approach does not posit an equilibrium between African religious traditions and biblical texts. However, the relevance, applicability and

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<sup>8</sup> Fabella (2003:105) continues to say that in Africa emphasis is given to cultural values such as relationship with ancestors, rites of passage, and traditional healing services. According to him Africans focus on the Africanization of Christianity rather than on the Christianization of Africa, while recognizing that not all aspects of African culture are in consonance with the Christian gospel.

appraisal of both traditions is pertinent in this study. Thus texts are primarily examined against the historical background in which they arise. Results are simultaneously analyzed comparatively. My research is however, distinguished from Kamuwanga (2007) thematically and contextually as evidenced by the variation of study subjects. Moreover, this research has endeavoured to collect and utilize observation methods to supplement a literature study. Ultimately, the research is an assessment of Pedi psalm-like songs in relation to biblical psalms.

#### 1.4.3 Qualitative dimension.

The researcher belongs to the *Pedi* people. He therefore has experience in life situations of the *Pedi* environment. By studying their songs in their context(s) he managed to situate the place of *Pedi* religious rituals' music and hence try to analyze them in terms of form and language use, contexts, content as well as functions. My contextual approach has led to the achievement of research objectives. Therefore, on the basis of the foregoing, this study adopted the qualitative approach in the collection and analysis of data (Mouton 2001:108). Data from this qualitative approach are analyzed and the results are compared with similar biblical psalm-texts. Thus, this study is contextual as it considers the local context (*Pedi* culture) and the influence of biblical and Israelite culture on the people.

## 1.5 DATA COLLECTION

### 1.5.1 Introduction

Subjects for this study (see Chapter 3) were identified because of their knowledgeable and informative qualities. The sample size of subjects consisted of the local chief (*kgoshi Maloma*), the president of *Contradosa*, *Simon Sete* (from Jan 1995 to date), seven members of *Contradosa* executive committee, five song leaders/composers, two headmen, eight appointed traditional healers who are also musicians, two *Pedi* cultural informants who were purposely identified. These together with other participants made up a total of forty subjects (see a list of names in appendix II).

During my interaction with different traditional dance groups in the *Sekhukhune* district, I have personally attended the musical and religious activities in the society. *Contradosa* members, dancers and singers in different rituals made it possible for me to attend public performances with them. During my association with them they corroborated my data on *Pedi* information/cultural aspects in its social context.

This thesis presents aspects of the culture of *Pedi* society as well as *Pedi* psalm-like songs as a pragmatic continuity. The rationale for music as a social activity does not meaningfully emerge until the ethnological background that informs it is explained. An aim of this thesis is therefore to be a descriptive, comparative, expository and interpretative study. It will present principles of religion and the internalization of *Pedi* psalm-like songs in a context in which it is vital,

integral, and with consolidatory focus on the dynamics of human interaction.

To put it tersely: *Pedi* society composes psalm-like songs, and in turn these songs promote moral and religious values in the society. This study will rely to a large extent on the knowledgeable perspectives of *Pedi* traditional healers and leaders of different traditional dance groups who are knowledgeable about *Pedi* psalm-like songs. It will expose *Pedi* perspectives of music, religion and culture as an event-specific activity with its own internal logic, and as a social institution.

#### 1.5.2 Scientific observation

The observation method<sup>9</sup> is a commonly used method, especially in studies relating to behavioural sciences. Kothari (1990:118) observes:

In a way we all observe things around us, but this sort of observation is not scientific observation. Observation becomes a scientific tool and the method of data collection for the researcher when it serves a formulated research purpose, is systematically planned and is subjected to checks and controls on validity and reliability.

These views are corroborated by Binnet (2003:97), when he notes that "observation is used as a research technique when data on actual practices are required". In this study therefore, data from documentary and oral sources are carefully collected. A combination of participant observation and free attitude interviewing methods have

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<sup>9</sup> Part of the primary source was the carrying out of both participant and non-participant observations, mainly within the *Sekhukhune* district, in *Limpopo* province of South Africa.

been employed in the course of research (Mouton 2001:105). A detailed collection process coupled with meticulous selection and analysis has been conducted. Consequently, a historical record for the present study and future secondary data analysis has been realized.

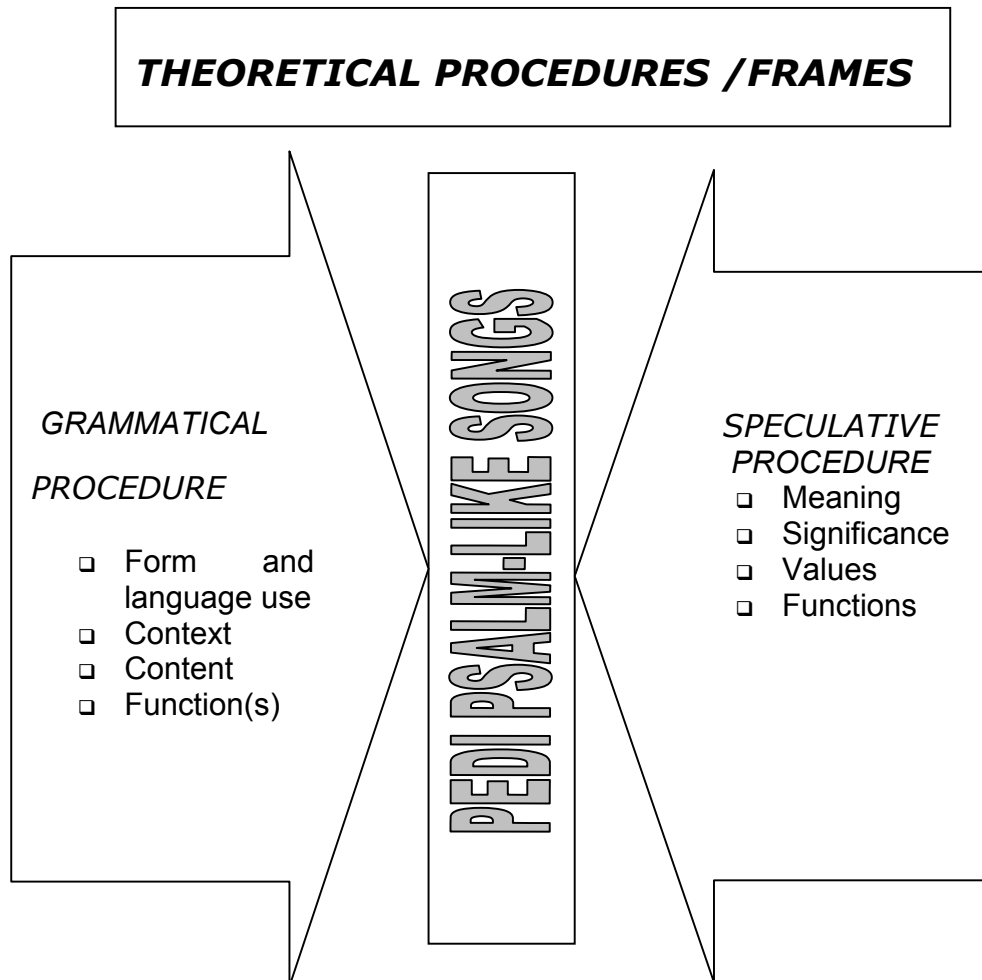
Here *Pedi* songs on audiotapes and videotapes are coded and translated to result in understandable statements and conclusions (see CD in the addendum). The *Pedi* songs collected from *malopo* rituals and different traditional dance groups in *Sekhukhune* district in *Limpopo* province are categorized and assessed according to their form and language use, content, contexts of genre or literary styles and functions. The known categories in the *Pedi* society are *lebowa*, *makgakgasa*, *dipepetlwane* and *kiba*.

### 1.5.3 Procedures of assessment

The procedure for assessment is derived from the form and language use, contexts, content and functions of both biblical psalms and *Pedi* psalm-like songs. The theoretical procedures or frames, as employed in the study, are illustrated in figure 1.5.3. In this figure the theoretical procedures or frames are based on the grammatical and speculative procedures that form the theoretical framework of the entire study.



FIGURE NO. 1.1: Illustration of theoretical procedures/frames derived from Fiagbedzi's (1989:45) "Philosophy of theory in ethnomusicological research".



In the context of this study, the grammatical procedures focus on a structure to assess both biblical psalms and *Pedi* psalm-like songs. This procedure underscores the form and language use, content, functions and contexts of genres or literary styles. Furthermore, they are a useful tool in the determination of techniques of making and transmitting of *Pedi* psalm-like songs from one generation to the other. The speculative procedure on the other hand addresses the

meaning, significance and value of *Pedi* psalm-like songs and their performance. An integration of the two approaches is utilized in this investigation. Hence this study interrogates form, language-structural elements and characteristics, content and context and function according to set objectives. This theoretical framework forms the conceptual framework of the study. Grammatical aspects of language embedded in song texts are analyzed. Form analytical investigations search literary devices such as metaphors. Thematic motifs are revealed against the related contextual background. Similarly the speculative analysis illuminates the meaning of concepts, their significance and functional values.

At the conceptual level, it is observed that *Pedi* psalm-like songs are not static. There is a continuous interaction between values embedded in their form and content and values associated with the modern western/eastern social values. Within this interface, we encounter the *Pedi* psalm-like songs to be assessed: these are emergent *Pedi* songs in the modern traditional interface context. When examined through the theoretical framework of this study, the grammatical theory focuses on the text, context, form and ritual purpose. On the other hand, the speculative theory illuminates meaning, significance, values and functions of the *Pedi* psalm-like texts.

Consequently the results from the assessment of biblical psalms and *Pedi* psalm-like songs are compared. The basis of this comparative assessment is done on form and language use, contexts, content and functions of genre styles (literary genres) in their unique religious context(s). In this way the religious significance of both *Pedi* psalm-like songs and biblical psalms is confirmed.

## 1.6 HYPOTHESIS

This study is based on the following research hypothesis: *African (Pedi) psalm-like texts contribute to the communal experience and worship of Pedi Africans in ways that are both similar and different when compared with the role of biblical psalms in their ancient Israelite context(s).*

*While specifics of structure and content may differ, both traditions mediate religious experience of believers and enhance their worship of the divine.*

## 1.7 CHAPTER DIVISION AND OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

The contents of this study may be outlined as follows:

- In chapter 1 an introduction to the study is provided by discussing the actuality and research problem, national and international value, aims and objectives, research design and methodology, procedures of assessment, hypothesis, chapter division and outline of the study;
- In chapter 2 I examine the various types of biblical psalms and their theological function(s) as found in the Old Testament *Psalter*.
- In chapter 3 I deal analogously with a variety of *Pedi* psalm-like songs.
- Chapter 4 provides a comparative analysis between the biblical psalms and the *Pedi* psalm-like songs.
- In the final chapter I conclude the study with a synthesis.

## 1.8 ORTHOGRAPHY AND TECHNICAL TERMS

Technical terms not listed hereunder will be defined and described in the footnotes. Furthermore I follow the orthography of the adjusted Harvard reference system. Many different Bible translations are used in this study. They are indicated in brackets in the text.

### 1.8.1 Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in the study: e.g (for example), etc (etcetera), vv (verses). Abbreviations of names of biblical books are: Jdg (Judges), Kgs (Kings), Ps (Psalm), Pss (Psalms), Jer (Jeremiah), Ez (Ezekiel), Jon (Jonah), Rom (Romans).

### 1.8.2 Technical terms

**ancestors:** deceased relatives who have intermediary role at family, clan and tribal levels in the *Pedi* society.

**bodika:** first phase of initiation school for boys.

**bogwera:** second phase of initiation school for boys.

**Contradosa:** Congress of Traditional doctors of South Africa.

**malopo:** is an illness, which can only be terminated by a ritual called *malopo*.

**meropa:** plural of *moropa*, which means drums.

**Pedi:** name of the tribe in Limpopo Province.

**psalm-like texts:** used in this study to classify *Pedi* religious cultural songs which serve various purposes and reflect the same poetic characteristics and historical settings as the biblical psalms.

**sorcery:** involves casting of spells, poisoning or other physical harm done secretly (Hayes 1995:340).

**Sotho:** language spoken by the Sotho people (*Basotho*).

**witchcraft:** is defined as the manifestation of mystical forces which may be inborn in a person, inherited, or acquired in various ways (Mbiti 1975:166; Hayes 1995:339). It may be used to cause harm on certain individuals (Hopkins 1980:60; Schiltz 2002:347).

## Chapter 2

# Biblical Psalms

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reflects on the nature, content and function of biblical psalms. This is not a comprehensive discussion but important aspects are dealt with to introduce the different genres and their theological functions. The Book of Psalms provides us with some of the most reliable theological, pastoral, and liturgical resources in the biblical tradition. No wonder the Psalms are referred to as the “Hymnal of the Second Temple” (Crenshaw 2001:1). They provide a window through which ancient Israel’s response to God’s presence or absence may be viewed. It is one of the most frequently read books of the Bible.

### 2.2 BIBLICAL PSALMS: CLASSIFICATION AND FUNCTION

#### 2.2.1 Introduction

Arguments for the classification and function of biblical psalms have been put forward by many commentators (e.g Mowinckel, 1962; Gunkel, 1985; Gerstenberger, 2001; Brueggemann, 2002; Seybold, 1990; Pleins, 1993 and others)<sup>10</sup>. In particular, Herman Gunkel has pioneered the classification of the psalms into different forms, types or genres (*Gattungen*) and tried to determine their life setting in ancient Israel (*Sitz im Leben*). Examples of his psalm-types include *inter alia*, “Hymns,” “Laments of the people,” “Laments of the individual,” “Songs

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<sup>10</sup> See also Murphy (1963), Eissfeldt (1965), Eaton, (1967), Kuntz (1974), Childs (1976), Kraus (1979), Wilson (1985), Stuhlmüller (1989), Day (1990), McCann (1993), Whybray (1995) and Crenshaw (2001).

of thanksgiving of the individual” and “Songs of thanksgiving of the people.” After his recognition of the presence of liturgy and the role and function of singing, dancing, shouting, sacrifices, prayers, temple, etc, he concluded that the psalms were related to the worship of ancient Israel and were not originally meant for meditation by pious individuals. Wilson (1985:513) has also paid attention to the canonical shape of the Psalter. He concluded that the Psalter is not a random collection of songs and prayers. The Psalter, according to him (Wilson 1979:513-514), is not a mere collection of liturgical material, but has the purpose of being read and heard as “a source of Torah.” That is, as a source of instruction. As such they are songs and prayers that originated from the response of the faithful to God.

Mays (1987:3) argued that Torah Psalms are present throughout the Psalter for the purpose of orientating the faithful to hear the Psalms as instructions of God. Other scholars such as Childs (1976:378), having recognized the limitations of the older approaches to the Book of Psalms has called for a totally new direction. He has argued for the need to go beyond the form-critical and historical critical approach to the Psalter. He argues that more attention should be given to the final form of the Psalter. He refers to this as “canonical criticism.” Thus, Childs’ (1976:376) analytical work allows scholars to determine how the meaning of individual psalms in the Psalter may be affected by their titles and their placement in that particular place in the canon.

Since much of the discussion on the biblical psalms, which appears at the beginning of this chapter, is based on an encounter between God and man, it makes sense to briefly discuss the psalms as a running account of the continuing encounter between God and man. The above

considerations and indications have shown an encounter based on who God is, made inevitable by who man is, obviously initiated by God, and needed, even if not always wanted by man. Now I will outline the various forms of genres in the Psalter.

## **2.2.2 Classification of genres**

### **2.2.2.1 Hymns of Praise**

#### a) Form

Ten percent of the psalms are hymns or prayers of praise (Craven 1992:23). These prayers typically celebrate God as creator and sustaining controller of history. Often they follow a threefold A-B-A pattern of the opening call to worship (A), followed by the motive or reason for praise (B), with a concluding recapitulation of the opening (A). Imperatives are regularly employed to express the mood of certainty that God's creation and order for the world is sure and worthy of praise.

Hayes' (1976:21) structure of hymns of praise also comprises of three elements and confirms the abovementioned: Firstly, the introductory exhortation or call to praise. Secondly, the main body of the hymn which praises God for his attributes and deeds. Thirdly, a concluding section expressing some wish, prayer, or blessing (see also Anderson 1972:33). In addition, he emphasized that the introductory exhortation is a call to worship, praise, thank, or bless God, as it is addressed to those who are called to share in the worship or praise<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Hayes (1976:21) insists that examples of hymns of praise in the Psalter are Psalms 8, 29, 47, 93, 95-100, 104, 113-115, 117, 135-136, 146-150. According to him, many other psalms contain sections or verses, which are praises of God. In addition, he found that some of the hymns of general thanksgiving might be



This genre is perhaps best motivated by Smith's (1984:15) view on hymns of praise: "some psalms are completely expressions of praise to God. They contain no laments and no petitions, only praises." Smith (1984:15) emphasizes that most hymns have two or three parts: namely, a call to praise, a reason or reasons for praising God, and sometimes a concluding call to praise. The call to praise is usually an imperative form such as: "rejoice in the Lord!" (Ps 29:1), "clap your hands!", "shout to God!" (Ps 66:1), "Bless the Lord, O my soul!" (Ps 103:1), "Praise ye the Lord" "Hallelujah," (Pss 111:1, 113:1, 117:1, 135:1, 146:1, 147:1, 148:1, 149:1, 150:1).

b) Language (structural elements and characteristics)

Smith's point of view links closely with what Gerstenberger (1988:17) terms "expressions of praise to Yahweh alone." Gerstenberger sees the hymns as pointing to: first, calling on Yahweh (Pss 8:2, 65:2-3, 139:1); second, summons to praise, call to worship (Pss 33:1, 34:4, 47:2; 95:1-2, 96:1-3, 98:1, 100:1-4, 105:1-3). third, praise of Yahweh because of His works, deeds and qualities (Pss 8:3-9, 19:8-11, 46:5-8, 47:3-10, 96:4-6, 103:3-19). According to Gerstenberger (1988:75), praise, thanksgiving, petition and complaint all aim essentially at securing the mighty help of Yahweh for his suffering, miserable congregation of the faithful<sup>12</sup>.

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considered as praises of God (Pss 67, 103, 105-107, 111, 124). He further regarded hymns of praise as sharing characteristics, features and a common structural pattern.

<sup>12</sup> The words of Gerstenberger (1988:18) indicate that the hymns themselves often refer to liturgical details and the very structure of some hymns suggests a responsive presentation (Ps 136). Naturally, instruments provided melody and rhythm for holy dances (e.g. the harp in Pss 57:9, 92:4; the timbrel in Exod 15:20, Ps 149:3; and the lute, pipe, cymbals, and other instruments in Ps 150:3-5). On the

For the purpose of substantiating this statement, Longman (1988:29) directs our attention to the lament song. In his study of the hymns of praise he has shown that they are common toward the conclusion of a lament. Various authors have pointed out that in numerous psalms, many hymns of praise focus on Israel's Exodus from Egypt, her possession of the land of Canaan, and God's care of and gifts to his people. Brueggemann (2002:55) recognizes "hymns of praise" to be a very general classification. Indeed, there is a tendency to treat the term hymn as a synonym for the phrase "psalms." But in fact, the term 'hymn' has a more precise reference. A hymn characterizes a public (as distinct from personal or intimate) song that is sung with abandonment in praise to God for the character of God's person or the nature of God's person or the nature of God's creating and liberating actions. Hayes (1976:18) suggests that hymns of praise give expression to the central themes of the spring celebrations.

While Anderson (1972:31) classifies twenty-four psalms as hymns, Longman (1988:24)<sup>13</sup> has demonstrated that hymns are easily recognized by their exuberant praise of the Lord. He further confirms that, though there are many different types of hymns, almost all of them share a similar basic structure: Hymns begin with a call to worship, and they continue by expanding on the reasons why God should be praised. Hymns often include, and sometimes conclude with further calls to praise.

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other hand, Gerstenberger (2001:37) observes that the hymnic praise as a whole thus radiates the values, concepts, and interests of a community of parishioners, not a people at arms.

<sup>13</sup> Thus even though the hymns of praise look toward God, they are no less concerned with the human than the laments, the songs of trust, or the psalms of thanksgiving. According to Pleins (1993:80), the hymns of praise differ only in those aspects of our humanness in which they wish to draw out for further inspection and redefinition.

c) Content and context

The emphasis on hymns in the Old Testament leads to an improved understanding of these songs of praise. While these songs can be elaborated in various ways, it is clear that its basic structure is clear and consistent. Focusing on the characteristics of this psalm-type, to my mind, the praise of God in the Old Testament is always devotion that tells about God, i.e. a theology and proclamation that seeks to draw others into the circle of those who worship this God.

Hymns of praise do open us to the God who lives in an enduring relationship with humanity and creation. Praise not only cultivates a sense of mystery and wonder toward God<sup>14</sup>, but also fosters a desire to extend the love and compassion of God to all people who are in need.

Human address to the divine expresses itself in two basic modes: petition and praise. In praise the worshipping individual or community offers adoration to the deity and proclaims his magnificence and the greatness of his works and deeds. He insists that, in singing hymns of praise, the congregation feels itself in the glorious and holy presence of God and extols who and what God is and does for the community.

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<sup>14</sup> The focus has been on God's creation, for Pleins (1993:89) says, "In our hymns of praise, we may not entirely penetrate the veil of eternity, but we can at least glimpse the enduring love that binds God to God's creation." Of interest also, was evidence from Pleins (1993) suggesting that hymns of praise show us that sky and sea, mountains and valleys, beasts and birds are all to be fed to offer praise to God. Pleins provide us with another function of these hymns: "The hymns of praise work to expand our comprehension not only of ourselves and of creation, but ultimately of the God of eternity. From Pleins' observation about the functions of hymns of praise, it is clear that the probing of ourselves and of creation, that we find in the hymns of praise is critical to our emergent spirituality, but these psalms go further to suggest that worship can indeed foster a sense of God's grandeur and God's compassion.

Hayes (1976:21) finally points out that the mood of the hymns reflects reverence, laudation and enthusiasm.

Mowinckel (1962:181) drives the point home well: "...a hymn is a true outcome of disinterested piety, praising the greatness and glory of God, who is at the same time merciful and terrible, the God who is God though every land lie desert"<sup>15</sup>. Therefore the hymnic psalm is a surprising, buoyant articulation of a move of the person or community into a new life permitting and life-enhancing context, where God's way and will surprisingly prevail (Brueggemann 2002:21). Such hymns are a joyous assertion that God's rule is known, visible, and affective just when we had lost hope.

#### d) Functions

A discussion of the most important functions of the hymns are as follows. The primary function of hymns or descriptive praises is to "extol God, his character, and so on, but occasionally this praise may be expressed indirectly by praising the Temple or the Holy city" (Anderson, 1972:35)<sup>16</sup>.

It may be argued thus, even though the hymns of praise point toward God, they are no less concerned with the human than other kinds of psalms. Hymns of praise teach worshippers that the deepest form of

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<sup>15</sup> Mowinckel (1962:181) confirms that it is before God that believers prostrate themselves in worshipping eagerness.

<sup>16</sup> Anderson (1972:35) defined this category as hymns of praise, or simply hymns, while Westermann preferred to speak about "descriptive praises" (Anderson 1972:35). The principal aim of this psalm type is to declare Yahweh's greatness, which he has manifested both in nature and in the history of Israel; thus the main theme is his praise.

divine praise sharpens worshippers' understanding of what it means to be human.

Craven (1992:48) holds that hymnic expressions of praise provide well-ordered maps of life that support belief in "God's non-negotiable governance" of the world. In speaking of the function of hymns, Craven thus declared that some hymns express the conviction that life is good.

Pleins (1993:76-89) points out that hymns of praise: Firstly, show that worship is a time to encounter the glory and majesty of God. Secondly they teach that the deepest form of divine praise actually sharpens people's understanding of what it means to be human. Thirdly they urge believers to reflect on their humanity against the backdrop of the eternal and to help the worshipper to gain some perspective on power and poverty, history and idolatry. Fourthly they show that a theology of God and creation must also be a theology of justice. Fifthly they present the worshipper with a positive vision of creation as the wellspring of joy and beauty. Sky and sea, mountains and valleys, beasts and birds are all to be freed to offer praise to God. In sum, they expand believers' comprehension not only of themselves and of creation, but ultimately of the God of eternity.

Hymns of praise are not philosophic tracts designed to pin down in precise terms the nature and substance of the divine but they open people's views on God who lives in an enduring relationship with humanity and creation (Pleins 1993:89). Pleins emphasizes that praise not only cultivates a sense of mystery and wonder toward God, but it

fosters a desire to extend the love and compassion of God to all who are in need.

From all this, one may conclude that, interest in asking God for favours yielded to a greater interest in praising God. It is important to read the entire Psalter and its component sections contextually, with an eye for the evolution of the various components. The heading of the Psalm book gives a hermeneutical key to interpret every psalm as a song of praise.

#### **2.2.2.2 Thanksgiving Songs**

##### a) Form

Thanksgiving Songs may be distinguished between individual and communal thanksgiving psalms (Gunkel 1926:475). In defining what a Thanksgiving Psalm is, Longman (1988:31) stresses the fact that a Thanksgiving Psalm is most easily identified by a restatement of the lament, which is now answered. There is a close connection between hymns and thanksgivings and a typical thanksgiving begins in a similar way to a hymn of praise. According to Anderson (1983:111) "...community Songs of Thanksgiving are relatively few in number, and even these come to being hymns".

In his distinction between a hymn and a thanksgiving song Westermann (1980:71ff; 81ff; 1981:97) prefers "descriptive praise" instead of "hymn" and "declarative" or "narrative praise" for the

community's songs of thanksgiving<sup>17</sup>. Craven (1992:10) argues that communal thanksgiving psalms "present most vividly the perennial dialogue between God and human beings." He insists<sup>18</sup> that the psalms as we read, study and pray them today, record only one-half of the conversation. Most often community songs of thanksgiving express the sentiments of members of the community in dialogue with God.

Declarative praises are also described as individual Songs of Thanksgiving, or private hymns of thanksgiving (Anderson 1972:35). These praises presuppose laments and they are man's response to God's gracious intervention. Their aim is not only to offer praises or thanks to God, but they are also intended as a testimony to the saving work of God, declared before the whole congregation. Thus also private thanksgiving is a communal act of worship. The ultimate characteristic of the Thanksgiving Song is that it has double speech direction namely to God and to the congregation. The worshipper directs his speech acts both to God and the believing worshippers.

b) Language (structural elements and characteristics)

Gerstenberger (1988:15) points out that Thanksgiving Psalms consist, inter alia, of the following elements: invitation to give thanks or to praise Yahweh<sup>19</sup>, account of trouble and salvation<sup>20</sup>, praises of

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<sup>17</sup> Kuntz (1994:89) is of the opinion that the former celebrates the deity's attributes and creative power while the latter responds to specific acts of divine deliverance.

<sup>18</sup> Brueggemann (2002:50) regards songs of thanksgiving as belonging to the personal sphere. The counterpart in the public domain is the hymn. In general, this is a sound division. He (Brueggemann 2002:51) has shown that these psalms do suggest that on occasion the whole community had given thanks.

<sup>19</sup> Pss 30:2, 5; 34:2-4; 118:1-4.

<sup>20</sup> Pss 18:4-20; 32:3-5; 40:2-4; 41:5-10; 116:3-4; 118:10-14.

Yahweh, acknowledgement of God's saving work<sup>21</sup>, blessings over participants in the ceremony<sup>22</sup> and exhortation<sup>23</sup>.

Mowinckel (1957:14) continually asserts that the Thanksgiving Psalm begins ordinarily with a general expression of the worshipper's intention to thank and praise God or with a general statement of His praise worthiness. Then follows the record about the worshipper's experiences, his distress and his salvation. Contributions made by Mowinckel (1957:14) and Gerstenberger (1988:15) have sparked further debate on the thanksgiving songs. For example, Brueggemann (1995:15) has shown that these psalms move from petition and plea to praise.

Mowinckel (1962:132-135) surmises, quite realistically, that the thanksgiving psalms are often richly varied. Sometimes it involves confession of sin e.g (Ps 32), at other times a religious problem, which becomes the main topic. Here fundamental emotion and gratitude find many expressions. But the personal element features in a special way<sup>24</sup>. These psalms seem to have been the particular favourites of the "wise."

Smith (1984:14) considers the individual songs of thanksgiving as expressions of the payment of those vows. He observes that the form of the individual Song of Thanksgiving usually includes an introduction, like "I will give thanks, to the Lord." (Ps 30:1), "I love the Lord," (Pss

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<sup>21</sup> Pss 18:47-49; 30:2-4; 12-1; 40:6; 92:5-6; 118:14, 28-29; 130:2; 138:1-2, Isa 12:1.

<sup>22</sup> Pss 22:27; 40-5; 41:2; 118:8-9.

<sup>23</sup> Pss 32:8-9; 34:10; 12-15; 40:5; 118:8-9.

<sup>24</sup> According to Mowinckel (1962:132-135) many of the psalms have been composed for use in situations, which are so humanly common and familiar. For example, in times of illness. Hence, we can take for granted that many of the professional temple-singers have also had similar experiences.



18:1; 116:1), a narration of past troubles, prayer and deliverance, and the announcement of a thank offering or a confession of praise.

### **c) Content and context**

Mowinckel (1962:32-43) effectively narrowed down the variety of life situations proposed by Gunkel. He sets the majority of the psalms in the context of a particular interpretation of Israel's cultic life. His work also demonstrates that the occasions for a thank offering with a Psalm of Thanksgiving were just as numerous as the dangers and tribulations and difficulties of life (Mowinckel 1962:54-55).

Thanksgiving Songs prove to be a testimony by one or many who has/have experienced salvation from distress and danger by Yahweh. A Psalm of Thanksgiving is actually a particular kind of hymn, a doxologizing thanksgiving for some definite benefit. It is the personally experienced outcome of Yahweh's power, righteousness and mercy. The experience expressed in this kind of psalm has established and again confirmed the confidence of the worshipper in Yahweh. Individual Psalms of Thanksgiving are the ones in which most personal touches and background are found.

Psalms of Thanksgiving affirm mostly that God hears the worshippers' prayer (Pleins 1993:60). For believers it is often difficult to believe that God listens to them yet the Psalms of Thanksgiving remind them that God hears them even in the midst of their sorrow: (e.g. "I sought the LORD, and God answered me; God rescued me from all that terrified me" (Pss 34:5; 138:3). Pleins (1993:63) singles out the notion that the community Psalms of Thanksgiving place a special emphasis on God's provision of food for the world.

There is no greater affirmation in these psalms of God's global concern than that found in Psalm 65. To substantiate this statement, Pleins (1993:64) directs attention to the fact that in several of the Psalms of Thanksgiving, thankfulness imparts to the worshipper a more profound respect for the house of prayer and ritual: the temple and its sacrifices. Psalm 65 sets this posture out clearly for the people of Israel.

While it is too simplistic to be prescriptive, it is clear that by contrast, these psalms give the worshipping community and the individual a way to offer thanks to God, in times when healing defeats suffering, forgiveness blots out sin, and humane deeds triumph over political expediencies. This response could only be made possible by a strategic commitment with the ability to giving thanks. Offering this song to God is a radically humanizing endeavour by which worshippers refuse to let the triumphs of evil destroy their capacity to see God at work in their torn world.

Brueggemann (2002:50) has shown that the most obvious song of new orientation towards life is the thanksgiving song. The speaker is now on the other side of a lament or complaint. Thanksgiving songs tell stories of getting into the trouble and emerging from the trouble (Pss 30, 34, 40 and 138). Brueggemann (1988:145-146) pointed out that the individual Songs of Thanksgiving offer a third way (besides disorientation and orientation) in which Israel goes back behind hymns to the concrete sphere of pain. He emphasizes that these are songs in which individuals and community tell of actual troubles that have been resolved.

d) Functions

Pleins (1993:64-74) gives some direction towards the functions of thanksgiving songs. This includes the following: firstly, they affirm that God hears and forgives; that He heals and gives nourishment. The Psalter's concern for healing challenges believers on the individual level, by asking them to rejoice when individuals find care, comfort and healing. Second, they confront believers with a worship that is wide-ranging and relevant to the lives of individuals and entire communities. Thirdly, they employ a praise language that is concretely rooted in the experience of human suffering. This is a praise that is tied to life lived in a world of pain, affliction, and social injustice. Fourthly, these psalms encourage the individual worshipper to share specific misfortunes and joys with the larger worshipping community. The songs empower them to continue the search for a worship that will deepen the experience of the God of history, the God of those who are in misery and sorrow, a God who speaks to injustice, poverty, suffering on the community and global scale. Lastly, these songs sharpen believers' sensibilities about joy in worship, calling for a response in words of thanksgiving when one discovers that God has truly "turned my lament into dancing" (Ps 30:12).

Thanksgiving Songs look back upon the situation of distress as a past reality from which redemption has been experienced. God is praised for his action of salvation which has changed the life and fate of the one praying (Hayes 1976:10). They express gratitude and praise with vow, offerings and meal (Ps 22:25-26). Thanksgiving Songs recognize the power and intervention of Yahweh. These songs confirm confidence

in Him. Testimony to the great deeds of God is therefore realized in both individual and community Thanksgiving Songs.

In sum, the prime functions of Thanksgiving Songs are to respond to the experience of God's grace and power, to exalt God as redeemer, provider and sustainer, as well as to bear witness to everything that God has done in the lives of the belief individual and community

### **2.2.2.3 Lament Songs**

#### a) Form

Laments can be distinguished as either communal or individual. They are prayers of complaint (Craven 1992:26-27). Forty percent of the prayers of the *Psalter* belong to this type. Laments reflect experiences in the depths of loneliness, frustration and fearfulness. The attitude that YHWH is ready to hear the protestations of the dissatisfied is coupled with the practice of unrestrained complaint. Psalmists are confident that, if God will intervene, distress would be alleviated.

The conviction in these prayers is that the world of the individual or the community is out of order. In many cases, the disequilibrium is charged to God who has failed the psalmists, or to enemies who have triumphed unfairly. Usually the psalmist claims innocence. The individual laments are not always negative. Most of them have a note of praise and a confession of trust in God. Seybold (1990:116)<sup>25</sup> classifies the following 36 psalms as laments of the individual (Pss 3;

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<sup>25</sup> Seybold (1990:120) further mentioned that the (36) lament psalms belong together according to his classification in a polar relationship. In their polarity they show what it is to be completely human.

5; 7; 13; 17; 22; 25; 26; 27; 28; 35; 38; 39; 41; 42; 43; 51; 54; 55; 56; 57; 59; 61; 63; 64; 69; 71; 86; 88; 102; 109; 130; 140; 141; 143). Day (1990:33) regards Psalms 12; 44; 60; 74; 79; 80; 83; 85; 90; 94; 126 and 137 as communal laments.

b) Language (structural elements and characteristics)

Laments are characterized by several structural elements. First, an address to God; second, a complaint; third, a confession of trust; fourth, petitions; fifth, words of assurance; sixth, a vow of praise (Day 1990:19-20). The psalmists unrestrainedly complain to God about whatever personal or communal crisis occasions their prayer. One of the remarkable things about lament is, that despite the fact that God is frequently held responsible for the distress, the psalmists usually express unqualified trust in God's good intention for them. Completely surrendering the situation to God, they freely petition God for whatever they desire.

The conclusions of Smith (1984:14), based on the community lament, are most relevant for our present study. The structure of the community lament is essentially the same as that of the individual lament. The community lament begins with an invocation and a cry for help. Reasons for the lament grow out of defeat in battle (Ps 44:9-10), the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple (Pss 74:4-7; 79:1-3), or a feeling that God has rejected his people without a cause (Ps 44:17-22). The petitions in the community laments are for God to "arise," "come," "hear," "consider," "be not silent," "remember," "help," "protect," "vindicate," "sustain," and "rescue." Motivations for God's actions are: "for thy name's sake" (Ps 79:9), "why should the

nations say, 'where is their God?'" (Ps 79:10; 74:10, 22-23), or "for we are brought very low" (Ps 79:8)<sup>26</sup>.

Anderson (1972:39) indicates that communal laments are less numerous than the individual songs of lamentation. He points out that the following psalms are often reckoned as communal laments (Pss 64; 74; 79; 80; 83; 85; 90; 124; 126; 137 and 144). Seybold (1990:115) classifies ten psalms as laments of the community (Pss 44; 60; 74; 79; 80; 83; 85; 89; 90; 137). They are prayers of the people, in a time of tribulation. On the other hand, Gerstenberger (1988:12) has identified several elements of laments, namely: invocation (appellation and initial plea or petition), complaint (descriptive, reproachful, petitionary), confession of sin or assertion of innocence, affirmation of confidence, plea or petition for help, imprecation against enemies, acknowledgement of divine response, vow or pledge, hymnic elements, blessings as well as anticipated thanksgiving.

Characteristic elements of the lament are the sharp cries for God's hearing and help, the descriptions of the people's plight, which are to stir God's compassion, and the invocation of judgement on the oppressors. Appeal is made to the covenant promises of God. Often there are expressions of confidence that God has heard the prayer (Eaton 1967:17).

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<sup>26</sup> Smith (1984:14) notes that one feature of community laments that is not often present in the individual laments is the appeal to the past. He is of the opinion that some of the community laments end in vows to praise God if he will hear their prayers and restore their fortunes (Pss 79:13; 80; 83; 90; 123; 129; 137). Westermann (1989:22) proposes that the communal lament psalms are a collection from the post-exilic period when Israel was a mere province inside an empire.

Personal laments usually begin with a call on God or invocation, such as, "O Lord, how many are my foes" (Ps 3:1), "Help, Lord" (12:1; 88:1), "How long, O Lord" (Ps 13:1); "Save me, O God" (Pss 54:1; 69:1). The structure of the personal laments normally includes invocation, lament, petition, confession of trust, motivation, assurance of being heard, and vow. All these elements are not always present in each psalm but enough of the form is present to identify the psalm as a lament.

The lament is the polar opposite of the hymn on the emotional spectrum, and similar to the hymn, the lament genre is primarily defined by its mood.

*"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

One of the difficult issues in interpreting the individual laments is the identity of the "enemies." The latter finding appears to be confirmed by the fact that the description of the enemies is to a certain degree coloured by mythical ideology (Birkeland 1955:16).

Longman (1988:27) argues that besides mood, individual laments are also united by a similar structure. He sums up his argument on the function of individual lament psalms to introduce the seven elements<sup>27</sup>, which are associated with a lament, though not strictly in

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<sup>27</sup> Rarely will all seven elements actually occur together, but a number of them will appear in each lament (Longman 1988:27). In his investigation of psalms, Longman (1988:26) holds that the lament is the psalmist's cry when in great distress. He has nowhere to turn but to God. We discover three types of complaints as we read through the laments: First, the psalmist may be troubled by his own thoughts and actions. Second, he may complain about the actions of others against him (the "enemies"). Third, he may be frustrated by God himself. Longman (1988:28)

order listed here. They include: an invocation; plea to God for help; complaints; confession of sin or an assertion of innocence; confidence in God's response; and a hymn or blessing.

c) Content and context

Lament psalms were created in certain great crises in the life of the individual and the nation. These psalms were composed by skilled poets for the use of other people less able to clothe their experiences in a poetical language (Anderson 1972:30).

Brueggemann (2002:41)<sup>28</sup> claims that communal lament psalms are not so numerous in the Psalter, yet they are important for the nurturing of responsible faith. In particular, Brueggemann's (2002:47) view of the communal lament psalms is that most frequently the psalms stay with the experience to bring the speech to a second decisive move, from disorientation to a new orientation. He sees laments as expression of disorientation.

The above arguments bring another problem to the fore, namely, the people's relationship with God. Plein's (1993:33) arguments regarding the community laments provide an illustration of the statement concerning the people's relationship with God. His main thesis is that, although many of the community laments reflect disarray and despair,

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concludes that "since a lament predominantly reflects a downcast mood, it is surprising to note that all laments include some expression of trust in God."

<sup>28</sup> Brueggemann (2002:41) in fact tried to convey the message that the psalms regularly bear witness to the surprising gift of new life just when none had been expected. Westermann (1981) however, has argued that the full form of the complaint psalm is the most basic rhetorical pattern in Israel's faith. Although he did not go on to say this explicitly, he is of the opinion that the full form constitutes a dramatic whole that moves from wretchedness to joy (Brueggemann 2002:48).



in several texts this conflictual atmosphere serves to focus the community's ongoing dialogue with God. This relationship is thought of in generational terms, like "God, we have heard with our own ears, our ancestors have told us, you acted in their day, in former times" (Ps 44:2). Yet, the community laments are hardly content with nostalgia; rather, they explore the contradictions between such an affirming history and a disrupted present in which the only sensible theological response seems to be, "God, you have thrown us off and torn us down" (Pss 60:3a; 74:1)."

It is however not clear from the context whether Pleins (1993:34) intends his statement to include how the communal laments can verbalize positive experiences. For Craven (1992:43) communal laments show that the psalmists verbalize their anger and resentment with no reservations. They express their bitterness and vindictiveness in the promise that once their own righteousness and God's justice are proven, they will praise him for deliverance and sovereignty. Furthermore, these laments contain both inspiring and shocking poetic expressions of individual and communal concerns, perceptions, and exchanges with God.

From the above considerations, there is much evidence to suggest that laments are connected to a specific cause, a threat to the people or an individual.

The following related remark by Anderson (1983:83) needs attention.

*"... in the individual laments, however, we can never be sure what the trouble is, for the psalmists resort to picturesque language to describe the human condition."*

The notion that the psalms of lament are pain put into words of joy appears to support a great deal of Brueggemann's viewpoint (1995:18)<sup>29</sup>. He means that the individual lament is a painful, anguished articulation of a move into disarray and dislocation.

The notion that the psalms of lament are pain put into words of joy remains enveloped in an uncertainty for Seybold (1990:112). Three conditions must be fulfilled before individual psalms can be put together into a common group: There must be a "common treasury of thought and feeling" a uniformity of meaning and of mood; there must be a "particular basis in worship" in which the texts are all rooted; a uniform setting in cultic life; and there must be a "shared diction," a uniformity of style and structure.

It seems that laments have a regular structure, but they never become stereotyped. I tend to see major parts addressing God, lamenting, confessing confidence, petitioning, and a vowing to praise.

Pleins (1993:26-27) maintains that the personal laments raise difficult questions about worship in a world of suffering and injustice; they call for a worship that strives to touch those who suffer, without negating their suffering or making them feel further abandoned; they bring about a free expression of grief, thereby opening the way to a deeper struggle with God; continually they call to plumb our beleaguered condition; they give voice to radical doubts about God's action in the world, and bring to the surface people's disquiet over suffering; and

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<sup>29</sup> Brueggemann (1995:18) puts a great deal of emphasis on the lament as a candid, even if unwilling, embrace of a new situation of chaos, now devoid of the coherence that marks God's good creation.

they show believers that the sufferer's call to God "out of the depths" (Ps 130:1) of misery and oppression is central to a vital worship<sup>30</sup>.

Craven (1992:22), however, offers a different opinion. He presumes that laments are prayers of complaint about crisis situations involving personal enemies, sickness, military affairs, concern for the sanctuary, friends who no longer are friends, problems with God's being inaccessible, or other distressing situations. He further notes that laments bespeak the knowledge that the individual or the community is not in control, and that God is an agent of powerful change. Laments call God to bring order out of chaos, and to restore the peace and wholeness of shalom.

#### d) Functions

Four functions regarded by Brueggemann (1995:68) as the most significant of this psalm-type are the following: firstly, manifestation of Israel at its best, giving authentic expression to the real experiences of life. Secondly, making clear that faith and worship deal with and are shaped by life as it comes to the people. Thirdly, witnessing to a robust form of faith that affirms that God seriously honours his part of the exchange. Fourthly, laments lead directly and necessarily to petition or supplication. Given these functions of the lament it is obvious that the context of the petition can be derived from the nature

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<sup>30</sup> In support of the above information, Pleins (1993:26-27) emphasized that in the individual laments, the questions directed at God can be rather pointed such as, "has God forgotten how to show pity?" (Ps 77:10a), or "If you keep track of people's sins, Lord, who will survive?" (Ps 130:3). Questions like these speak to the harsh reality of human suffering in the face of divine indifference. He also mentioned that throughout the individual laments there is a compelling theological and human response to the reality of personal suffering and social injustice, a response that arises from inside situations of hurt and hopelessness, injustice and oppression.

of the complaint, for it urges simply that the distress should be dealt with.

Craven (1992:28-29) notes that in laments, honest complaint coupled with complete trust in God seem to effect relief for the psalmists. Laments bespeak the knowledge that the individual or the community is not in control and that God is an agent of powerful change. They call on God to act so as to bring order out of chaos, to restore the peace and wholeness of "shalom." Laments are spoken by those whose world is out of order. Laments are powerful testimonies to the faith of a people who believed it is appropriate to praise God from the depths of human distress with honest words of complaint.

It is worthwhile to mention here Stuhlmüller's (1989:107-108) view on acknowledging how the largest number of psalms fit into the category of individual laments. Stuhlmüller has suggested that the division between communal and personal laments is somewhat arbitrary. She assumes that individuals may have composed the psalms not only to express and sustain their personal sorrow in God's presence, but also to share their sorrow with other Israelites on days of mourning. Crenshaw (2001:16)<sup>31</sup> endorses this observation by stating that the majority of laments give the impression of having been composed for use by a single individual, but exceptions such as Psalm 60 lend a communal dimension to the voice of distress.

The lament is one of the basic forms of psalmic expression. Most other psalm forms are derived from or responses to the lament, a viewpoint which is shared by Brueggemann (1995:18). Brueggemann (2002:39)

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<sup>31</sup> Crenshaw (2001:81) is convinced that the original circumstances evoking the laments were later generalized to make the prayers more universal.

emphasizes that it is the function of personal laments to enable, require, legitimate and complete the rejection of the old orientation.

Brueggemann has shown that the lament psalms express the basic moves of faith in God, ranging from deep alienation to profound trust, confidence and gratitude.

Laments belong rather to healing ceremonies within the circle of the family (Miller 1986:6). Miller motivates his observation by citing an example that a person who may be threatened by any of a wide range of troubles goes to a ritual expert within the family or clan, someone trained in the ritual but not a priest, participates in a healing rite involving both words and actions, and gets rid of the threat or trouble. In Miller's view laments were more like family or group therapy than prayer and worship in the church. He further mentions that lament psalms are an indication of the fact that individuals live their lives "above all in the small world of the primary group" rather than in the larger, albeit secondary, when viewed sociologically-sphere of community of people.

Pleins (1993:34) affirms that community laments have several functions, namely: firstly, they make room for the worshipping community to say to God: "You fed them (the people of Israel), the bread of tears. You had them drink tears in great measure. You set us at strife with our neighbours and they ridicule us," (Ps 80:6-7). Secondly, they focus on the dire consequences of empire building. Thirdly, they create a space for the community as a whole to gather and reflect on its stricken condition. These psalms do not try to give a final answer. Fourthly, they raise disturbing questions about God's

actions towards Israel. In one case, such a question opens the lament: “Why are you so angered with the flock in your pasture?” (Ps 74:1). The poet wrestles with the contradictions of a theology, which believes in a God who rewards and punishes but must contend with a world that knows war, destruction, and justice. Fifthly, they press us to consider how worship can, and indeed must, speak to a society and a globe that is beset by suffering. Lastly, they give the worshipping community a compelling vocabulary for confronting a God who oversees social dislocation and tragedy.

#### **2.2.2.4 Royal Psalms**

##### 2.2.2.4.1 Introduction

There are two different kinds of royal psalms, namely, psalms about the earthly king and Yahweh as king. These are psalms centering around the king, whom can be understood as the pre-exilic Israelite monarch (Day 1990:12). Amongst other things these psalms deal with the king’s coronation (Pss 2; 110), marriage (Ps 45), and battles (Pss 18; 20; 144). These psalms are not strictly a form-critical category, since there is no typical structure, but a category delineated purely on grounds of content. Seybold (1990:19) argues that there are clear signs of their origin in the Jerusalem Temple. These psalms relate to the so-called “Ritual of the King,” and the royal cult at the state sanctuary. They stem from the heritage of the first temple. Seybold (1990:115) defines that they derive primarily from post-exilic times. Therefore he asserts that their group identity bears the stamp of a pre-exilic tradition.

Like Gunkel, Anderson (1972:39) is convinced that royal psalms are considered to be one of the main psalm types, but unlike Gunkel's opinion, they do not form an independent literary type. They are rather comprised of psalms of various categories. Their distinguishing feature is the subject matter, which concerns the relationship between God and the king. Hayes (1976:10) argues that several psalms which belong to the category of hymns or songs of praise do not have God as the primary object of praise. For example, Psalm 45 is a psalm in praise of the earthly king and his bride on their wedding. Thus one could classify this and other such psalms as royal hymns.

Gerstenberger (1988:14), on the other hand, is not much in favour of the idea that royal psalms do not form an independent literary type. He asserts that royal psalms are singled out as a separate *genre* and that they fit into the common categories of complaint and thanksgiving (Pss 18; 89; 144), of which intercession is an apt modification (Pss 20 and 21). There are also hymns for a number of specific occasions (e.g. annual ritual of re-enthronement at the Feast of Tabernacles, war time, victory and coronation).

#### **2.2.2.4.2 Psalms of the earthly king**

##### a) Form

Psalms of the earthly king find their setting in specific historical situations (Bullock 2001:181). Bullock has advocated that in these psalms the focus is, for example on the subject of the king's conquests,

his concern for justice and the oppressed, as well as on the theme of the Davidic covenant.

Both Westermann (1981:109) and Bullock (2001:182) share the conviction that these psalms are a major source of messianic hope. Royal psalms, are sometimes called "messianic psalms". Westermann (1981:109) is convinced that the "original" significance of the royal psalms referred to the earthly king in Jerusalem.

b) Language (structural elements and characteristics)

The common thread that holds psalms of the earthly king together is the subject of kingship (Bullock 2001:178-179). Bullock discusses the most obvious language of these psalms. They refer to the "king", mention the "anointed" one by means of a noun or make use of the verb, but they also refer to David. Seven of the psalms refer to the "king" (Pss 1, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89), while six of them (Pss 2, 18, 20, 45, 89, 132) refer to the "anointed one" (Hebrew *mashiakh*, or English "messiah"). In the four that do not use the word "king" at all, David is nevertheless mentioned in the content of two (Pss 132 and 144), while neither king nor David is mentioned in the other two (Pss 101 and 110; see Bullock 2001:178). In his view, there are other criteria holding these psalms together as a group. Two of them (Pss 101 and 110) show none of the three characteristics. Some of these psalms clearly describe the power, paraphernalia, and activities of the king, even though they do not mention the king's name. Psalm 101 satisfies the "royal" criteria whereby the psalmist promises to "cut off every evildoer from the city of the LORD" (v.8), a kind of power over Jerusalem that no one other than the king would possess (Bullock 2001:179). Psalm



110 uses language that obviously refers to the king, by speaking of him as "my lord" (v.1) and referring to his "sceptre" (v.2). These allusions suppose the king figure.

#### b) Content and Context

Bullock's (2001:179) emphasis on the relationship of the king with the Lord is an important feature of these psalms. The Lord, has installed his earthly representative in Jerusalem: "I have installed my king/on Zion, my holy hill" (Ps 110:6).

When the royal psalms refer to the king and to David, they directly indicate historical figures in the Israelite history. When the psalmist declared "You are my Son; today I have become your Father" (Ps 2:7), the psalm notes the special relationship between God and the king who reigned in Jerusalem.

On the basis of the introductory formula, Old Testament commentators generally affirm the presence of prophetic speech in Psalm 110. While some suggest that the speaker is a cultic prophet (Anderson 1972:767; Kraus 1978b:929; 1989:346), others prefer to assign the oracle to a court prophet (Weiser 1962:693; 1987:476; Seybold 1996:438), or some simply speak of a court poet who adapted a prophetic revelation (Allen 1983:86).

With regard to Psalm 110, Gunkel recognizes the prophetic style in the text but proposes that a singer announces an oracle before the king, probably in the sanctuary (Gunkel 1904:17; 1926:481, 483). He made cross-references to his own discussion of Psalm 20 where he accepted

the existence of a sanctuary (Gunkel 1926:82-83). Gunkel also observes that Psalm 110 bears a similar introductory formula which is found in Assyrian oracles. He notes a similar expression in Psalm 110 and the Assyrian prophetic text currently referred to as SAA 9 1-4, of which both speak about the deity at the king's right hand (Gunkel 1926:481). Nevertheless, Gunkel (1926:481, 483) prefers to identify the psalmist simply as a poet or an "inspired singer" (who received a "divine revelation"), without the explicit use of the term "prophet".

Gerstenberger (2001:265) observes that the universal outlook, world government from Zion and eschatological battle against the nations are incompatible with pre-exilic Judean theology; the psalm rather emerged with post-exilic messianic expectation by using veiled language to avoid the attention of Persian officials (Gerstenberger 2001:266-267). Tournay (1960:26; 1991:211-212; 1998:330-331) argues that Psalm 110 cannot be dated earlier than the fourth or third centuries because of its dependence on the narrative of Abraham and Melchizedek, which must be dated in the post-exilic period.

Melchizedek's association with the Creator God confers universal dominion over the Creator's representative, in this case the Melchizedekian king (Seybold 1996:439). In support of the possibility of a pre-exilic date, he notes that the theology of the post-exilic community (reflected in 2 Chr 26:16) was no less cautious about such a merger than the pre-exilic community. Likewise Rooke (1998:206-208) argues that the Jewish community was ambivalent toward Hasmonaean pretensions to royalty: a king might have functioned as priest by virtue of sacral responsibilities, but a priest (i.e the Aaronic Hasmonaean) was not an acceptable substitute for the expected Davidic monarch.

Day (1998:74) has argued that “the most natural time for the Israelite royal ideology to have been fused with that of the Caananite Melchizedek king was soon after David’s conquest of Jerusalem”. In his view, Psalm 110 preserves authentic traditions concerning the royal priesthood of Jebusite Jerusalem. Against proposals for a post-exilic fusion, Day notes that post-exilic theology sought to enhance the standing of the Aaronite priesthood, making the origin of a Melchizedek tradition unlikely at this time.

Because of the inclusion of first-person, divine speech in Psalms 110; 2; 132 and 89, as well as the use of introductory speech formulas (Pss 110:1, 4; 2:7; 132:11 and 89:20), these royal psalms presented to the worshipping community divine words concerning the legitimacy of the king, his royal prerogatives, and the hope for his dynasty and kingdom (Hilber 2005:127). Rather than prophetic speech uttered in the context of worship, the poet drew from elements of the prophetic tradition that originated outside the cult. For Hilber (2005:127) two lines of argument suggest that Psalms 2; 89; 110 and 132 witness to prophetic ministry within the cult. First, details in the psalms suggest that prophecy was uttered in the liturgy. The opening announcement of an “oracle” (Ps 110:1) aroused in the congregation the expectation of prophetic speech. Similarly, the performance “today” (Ps 2:7) lends a spontaneity to the divine words of the psalm. Psalm 132 reports on the transfer of the ark (a liturgical event) and offers prayer for the king (a liturgical act). Here the divine words form a response. Second, both the form and function of comparative sources support the likelihood that these royal psalms preserve cultic prophecy. An Egyptian enthronement ritual, including oracular speech, corresponds in many respects to Psalms 2 and 110. The form and style of Assyrian cultic prophecy is

very comparable to the speech of all four psalms and functionally similar to the royal legitimation and enthronement (Hilber 2005:127). Hilber recognizes the presence of Assyrian cultic prophecy in a seventh-century monarchic context in Israel which support the argument that prophets supported the king in worship in pre-exilic Israel as well. Thus Psalms 2; 89; 110; and 132 preserve elements of this cultic prophecy.

d) Functions

Royal psalms celebrate occasions in the king's life like weddings (Ps 45), coronations (Pss 2; 110), preparation for battle (Pss 20 and 21) or ritual enactments (Ps 72). It is through the God of the worshipping community that the king's just judgement will affect justice for the people (Anderson 1972:40).

Brueggemann (2002:51) has proposed that psalms about the earthly king belong to the category of songs of new orientation *par excellence*. They give public liturgical articulation to the "kingship" of Yahweh, which is celebrated.

Psalms of new orientation, according to Brueggemann (2002:72-73), celebrate a new settlement of the issue of theodicy. The liturgical event is a foretaste of the real settlement. In his view, psalms of new orientation speak about the new state of things when life is whole and well-ordered, when the system is just and God is known to be righteous and just. For that reason these psalms reveal a readiness to a life of order that replaces the old order, which had been distorted by pain, suffering, life endangerment, etc.

Psalms of the earthly king nurture a worship that boldly sets the demands of justice before those who hold power (Pleins 1993:102). They not only describe the king and his conquests, but they also paint a picture of the monarchical era as one characterized by justice and righteousness. Psalm 2, for example, was probably used in more than one historical situation. During and after the exile in Babylon, when Israel had no king, the psalm must have been reinterpreted and used to anticipate the coming of the ideal king, a new David, the coming Messiah (Mowvley 1989:11).

Psalm 72, a prayer for the king, is not so much a prayer for his personal well-being, but that he may rule to bring prosperity to the whole nation. The king is responsible to establish peace and justice in his kingdom. This means more than keeping an eye on the law courts; it means ensuring that social life is ordered in such a way that no one is neglected, oppressed or deprived (Mowvley 1989:158). The justice which the king has to exercise, is measured against the justice of God. It is this divine justice which the king, as God's adopted son (see Ps 2:7) must maintain (Mowvley 1989:159).

#### **2.2.2.4.3 Psalms of Yahweh's kingship**

##### a) Form

Psalms of Yahweh's kingship (Pss 93; 96-99) form a unified block (Gerstenberger 198:38). It seems that this group of psalms does not represent a formal psalm *genre* as such. Bullock (2001:196) suggests that the universal perspective in Psalms 96-99 suggests that Psalms of Yahweh's kingship may have been dependent upon Isaiah 40-66 and

might have originated in the post-exilic era. In sum, Psalms 93, 95-100 might all be linked to the kingship of Yahweh.

b) Language (structural elements and characteristics)

The basic characteristic clause that binds these psalms into a group is the Hebrew declaration *yhwh malak*, which either means "The LORD (Yahweh) reigns," or "The LORD (Yahweh) is king" (Pss 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; and 99:1), In Psalm 47:8 the clause occurs as "*elohim malak*" (God is king).

Psalms of Yahweh's kingship by certain scholars also called enthronement psalms (Smith 1984:15). They usually begin with or contain the phrase "Yahweh reigns" (Pss 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1) or "God reigns" (Ps 47:8). Themes of God as creator and judge are prominent in these psalms and there is a strong universal tendency in them. Yahweh is king of the whole earth. However, there is also a tone of particularism in the these psalms. Moses, Aaron, Samuel, and Zion are mentioned in some psalms (Pss 99:1; 97:8) along with Israel's rebellion in the wilderness (Pss 95:8-11). God is the shepherd of his people (Ps 95:7) and has been faithful to his covenant with them (Ps 98:3).

These psalms portray Yahweh as taking his place on his throne (Pss 47:8; 99:1) to judge the world (Pss 96:10, 13; 98:9) and to rule in righteousness (Pss 97:2, 10-11, 99:4). Smith (1984:15) associates this group of psalms with the idea of the kingdom of God.

General characteristics in the Yahweh's kingship psalms are inter alia (Watts 1965:343):

- Concerns over the earth, the people and the nations (Pss 96; 97; 98; 99);
- Reference to other gods (Pss 96; 97);
- Signals of kingship and praise (Pss 93; 96; 97; 98; 99);
- Characteristic deeds of Yahweh, namely, to create and to judge (Pss 93; 96; 97; 98; 99);
- Expressions of praise before the heavenly king (Pss 96; 97; 98; 99).

Prinsloo (1997:210) shows the following similarities between the Yahweh kingship psalms:

- Hymnic expressions and descriptions (Pss 96:1; 97:1; 98:1; 99:5);
- Emphasis on Yahweh's savings acts (Pss 96:3; 4; 98:2); creation works (Ps 96:5); acts in history (Ps 99:7);
- Emphasis on the powerful deeds as well as on the greatness of Yahweh (Pss 96:4; 6; 97:7; 98:2; 99:2).
- Kneeling, worship and honouring God (Pss 96:9; 97:5; 99:5).
- Universal descriptions (Pss 96:1; 7; 9; 97:1; 98:5; islands: Ps 97:1; introduction of the saving acts to the nations: Ps 98:2; elevation above the nation: Ps 99:1-2; governing the world: Ps 98:9).

Prinsloo (1997:211-212) is of the opinion that the similarities between these psalms bind them together. Craigie (1983:347) agrees that they are connected by the common theme of praising Yahweh's kingship. Although these psalms have functions in unity, they each have their own unique characteristics. Some of them form a closer underlying bond. It is seen that Psalms 96-97 and Psalms 98-99 are closer bound together. According to the content Psalms 96-97 and Psalms 98-99 show similarities (Tate 1990:508).

b) Content and context

In this corpus it is explicitly stated that Yahweh's throne is established "from of old", his kingdom is "from everlasting" (Ps 93:2). The God who established his kingdom from old, will also reign for ever (Ps 93:5).

Seybold (1990:115) argues that Royal Psalms relate to the so-called 'Ritual of the king', and the royal cult at the state sanctuary in pre-exilic times. They stem from the heritage of the first temple, and defy any classification which is mainly derived from post-exilic times. Therefore Seybold is convinced that their group identity bears the stamp of a pre-exilic tradition.

The role of the earthly king was to ensure peace and justice within the Israelite community (Ps 72). The frequency of the topic of justice in these psalms would therefore suggest that these psalms were intended to deal with circumstances where injustice prevails (Bullock 2001:190). Yet, this God of righteousness and justice does not stand apart from his creation. Therefore an earthly symbol of his heavenly throne is situated between the cherubim of the ark of the covenant (Ps 99:1).



As righteousness is expected of a king who reigns over the whole world, God's righteous judgement applies to all nations (Ps 97:6). God's righteous judgement even goes beyond the sphere of humanity (Bullock 2001:190). As creator who endows his creation with himself, the creation also proclaims his righteousness:

*The heavens proclaim his righteousness,  
And all the peoples see his glory (Ps 97:6)*

#### d) Functions

The principal function of the Yahweh's King psalms is to declare Yahweh's greatness, which he has manifested both in nature and in the history of Israel; thus the main theme focus on his praise.

These psalms further stress the kingship of Yahweh in view of the failure of the earthly kingship represented by the Davidic dynasty (Bullock 2001:190). When the human institution had failed (Pss 2-89), there was no greater reassurance than to illustrate that Yahweh is the king himself (Pss 90-100).

Psalms of Yahweh's kingship (Pss 47; 93; 96-99) betray a fervent desire to see Yahweh universally as victorious and Israel as part of the greater universe. In this regard these psalms give stimulus to a new dimension of individual guilt, personal salvation, communal perseverance, and hope for restoration (Gerstenberger 1988:28).

These psalms further announce and proclaim the kingdom of God; they praise the God who reigns in spite of the appearance of distressful circumstances and they paint a picture of the future reality of the kingdom of God alongside the present tragedy, which a life with Yahweh can transcend.

#### **2.2.2.5 Songs of Zion**

##### a) Form

The term 'Songs of Zion' is derived from 137:3, where the captors of the Israelites asked them to sing the 'Songs of Zion' (Anderson 1972:35; Smith 1984:15; Kraus 1988:58). In Anderson's view, these songs were probably a group of songs composed for the glorification of Jerusalem, and ultimately for the praise of Yahweh, for the glory of Zion is Yahweh.

The Songs of Zion are classified as such on the basis of content rather than form (Smith 1984:16). Zion in these psalms is symbol for the dwelling place of God, which can never be moved. It is a place of refuge for threatened and buffeted people of God (e.g Ps 46:1). Songs of Zion can be identified as Psalms 46, 48, 76, 84, 87 and 122.

Kraus (1988:65) dates the "Songs of Zion" to the time of the Israelite monarchy-especially in those cases when the most ancient (pre-Israelite) traditions glorify the city of God (Pss 46; 48; 76; and the excursus on Ps 46).

Consequently, there is justification for regarding these songs implicitly as praises of Yahweh. Songs of Zion therefore function as a subdivision

of the ordinary hymns (Crenshaw 2001:7). In form-critical terminology, Gerstenberger (2001:539) confirms that these songs are hymns of praise. They reflect not the theology or tradition of one particular family of singers but the early Jewish community in the dispersion. In this community worship was oriented toward the spiritual center of the Israelite faith, Jerusalem. Nevertheless, ancient or pre-Israelite traditions of the mountain of the gods in northern territories, known also from Ugaritic mythology, are preserved for Israel in texts like Psalm 48:3 (Gerstenberger 2001:539).

The Songs of Zion, whose theme is the preservation of the holy city in the face of enemy attack, are probably related to the pilgrimage songs too. Westermann (1989:283) illuminates that these psalms presuppose the choice of Zion, with its city and temple, as the mountain of God. He is convinced that many of the motifs in this psalm category (e.g Pss 46; 48; 76; 84; and 87) go back to the pre-Davidic era, when Zion was still a Jebusite holy place.

b) Language (structural elements and characteristics)

Four central ideas appear in the Songs of Zion (Miller 1986:13): first, God, whose power is revealed in creation and deliverance from exile, enters into rule and appears on Zion. Second, there is the theme of deliverance from exile, return, and renewal as people occupy a central place. Third, the nations recognize the redeeming acts of God and assemble to worship Him on Zion; and fourth, Israel's posterity shall possess the land and inherit Yahweh's blessing.

Form-analytical investigations arrive at the following observations regarding the structural elements and characteristics of these psalms: firstly, at the beginning of some of these psalms stand confessionallike static expressions with emphatic and similar headings. Almost always in the form of predicate nominatives appear sentences that describe God as resident and protector of Zion, or Zion as a fortress splendidly furnished and fortified by God (Ps 46:7), "The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress". Secondly, these static statements are then supported by sentences with verbs in the perfect tense: the Lord and protector of Zion is Yahweh, because he has averted the assaults of the nations (Ps 87:2). Thirdly, detailed consequences are often given to the hearers in imperative sentences, preceded by jussive forms and enjoining people to acknowledge Yahweh (Ps 46:8a, 10), to join in the festal procession (Ps 48:12ff) or to perform their vows (Ps 76:10f). Although Kraus (1988:58) is convinced that most of the Songs of Zion probably originated in pre-exilic times, he asserts that their materials were handed down in most diverse ways and were in later times adapted.

In the Songs of Zion the chosen sanctuary of Yahweh is glorified in various ways. Kraus (1989:187) has observed that the mystic elements have been blended into the cultic election tradition and served to glorify the holy place that transcends time and place. It is possible that the glory of the chosen city was celebrated musically in an entrance procession with song and dance (2 Sam 6).

c) Content and context

Songs of Zion reflect a communal orientation that affirms Israel's close relation to God and rejoices in Zion as God's chosen abode (Miller 1986:14).

These psalms glorify Zion. The holy mountain of Jerusalem is the place where Yahweh is present (Ps 46:5). The situation and context of these psalms can well be ascertained from a number of revealing verses. Thus, according to Psalms 84:2f and 122:2 Zion was celebrated in song as the entered holy place. At this occasion the psalmists look back upon their pilgrimage (Ps 122:1) but then turn toward the wonders of the city of God. 'Associations with the great cultic ceremony of entrance, with the ark of the covenant as the focal point, are discernible' (Kraus 1988:58). In the glorification of Zion, reference is made to the age-old cultic traditions of the Jebusite sanctuary (Kraus 1988:58). Kraus also shows that these songs of praise had a connection with that festal activity which has found its literary expression in Psalm 132.

A number of these Songs of Zion celebrate the Lord's choice of Zion with Jerusalem as the earthly center of the Lord's presence (Freedman 1992:533). The songs declare the Lord's presence in Jerusalem (Ps 46:7, 11) as the city of God (Ps 46:4-5; 48:8; 76:2; 87:1-3), where beautiful Mount Zion is located (Ps 48:1-3). Psalm 48:12-14 suggest a procession around the city walls. Psalm 84 expresses the thoughts of someone longing to visit the temple, where even the sparrows find refuge (vv.1-4, cf. v.10). Psalm 122 expresses the joy of a pilgrimage to the city and prays for the peace of Jerusalem.

Gerstenberger (2001:140) contends that Songs of Zion are rooted in rituals and festivities around the holy site of Yahweh's choice. He is convinced that some other texts, which are focusing on Jerusalem and Zion (e.g. Ps 87) have the special function of clarifying the admission of foreigners to the Holy City. Jerusalem as a city was apparently famous for her invincibility guaranteed by her deities of old (Gerstenberger 2001:328).

Schaefer (2001:357) infers that some Songs of Zion can be classified according to content. According to him, in these Songs of Zion (Pss 46, 48, 84, 122), Jerusalem is the focus of praise. God and the holy city, his dwelling place among the people, are inseparable. Israel's greatness and strength were conceived as connected with God who dwells in her midst. Psalms 46 and 48 celebrate this invincibility of Zion.

#### d) Functions

The role of the Songs of Zion for the temple and praise stands on the foreground. Mountain and temple of Yahweh as symbols of Zion are praised for various reasons. Pleins (1993:119-127) introduces several functions for the Songs of Zion. Firstly, they are not only making believers conscious of peace and security issues, but they also raise fundamental questions about war. In what is perhaps the most provocative of the Songs of Zion, the psalmist proclaims that it is from Zion, God's "lair" (Ps 76:3), that God breaks the flaming (arrows of the) bow, the shield, the sword, and war (Ps 76:4).

Secondly, these songs point to the achievement of communal peace and global security. Thirdly, they are not solely concerned with Jerusalem's ability to survive foreign attacks but are looking beyond that, to see how the divine presence within the city can creatively transform the world beyond the walls of the city. For Pleins (1993:127) these psalms provide believers a valuable opportunity to assess critically the just-war tradition, but also help the community to discover that it is the God in the city, not the king in the palace, who brings well-being and peace to the world outside Zion's walls.

The Songs of Zion focus on Jerusalem or Zion as the place of God's presence. Furthermore they express the people's joy over the physical experience of Yahweh's presence in Jerusalem, the sacred mountain (Crenshaw 2001:85). Therefore these hymns communicate God's marvellous victories and just power to believers. Gerstenberger (2001:87) is convinced that Jerusalem and the Zion songs express the strong desire of early Jewish people from the fifth century on to visit the city of David, where the roots of ancient Israel's political and religious strength were.

The following generalizations can be made when taking into consideration comments and contributions made by the above-named biblical scholars. It seems reasonable to assume as argued by Miller (1986:13) that God, whose power is revealed in creation and deliverance from exile, enters into rule and appears on Zion. From this genre it appears that the theme of the divine presence in Zion penetrates most of the hymns and prayers (Pss 46:5,10; 48:1-4; 78:68-69; 87:1-2). In these texts, the psalmists tirelessly proclaim Yahweh's delight in his holy mountain.

### 2.2.2.6 Wisdom Psalms

#### a) Form

Some psalms in the Psalter have been categorized as “wisdom psalms”. No two scholars seem to agree about the precise number of psalms to be included in this category. According to Mowinckel (1962:76-80) the wisdom psalms are Psalms 1, 34, 37, 49, 78, 105, 106, 111, 112 and 127. He called it “learned Psalmography.” Murphy (1963:60) recognized the wisdom psalms as Psalms 1, 32, 34, 37, 49, 112 and 128 together with some psalms parts like 28:8-10, 12-14; 31: 24-25; 39:5-7; 40:5-6; 62:9-11; 92:7-9; 94:8-15. His criteria<sup>32</sup> for identifying wisdom psalms were extended to include juxtaposition of the wicked and the righteous, the notion of two ways, retribution, offerings of counsel, and the phrase “fear of Yahweh”.

Most scholars<sup>33</sup> accept the presence of a small group of wisdom psalms. Longman (1988:33) is of the opinion that scholars normally turn to books like Proverbs, Job, Song of songs and Ecclesiastes, but in the Book of Psalms there are several psalms that contain elements of the Old Testament wisdom literature.

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<sup>32</sup> Murphy also thinks that the sages always inserted brief sections in the psalms to give them a wisdom character (Pss 18:21-25; 27:11; 32:8-9; 86:11; 92:6-10; 13-15; 94:8-15; 105; 107; 43; 111:2; 144:3-4; 146:3-4; see Whybray 1995:152-160). He further notes that Psalms 1 and 119 have a close relationship with the wisdom. His criterion for identifying them as wisdom psalms is their didactic character.

<sup>33</sup> Seybold (1990:118), Rewards and punishment will be fairly realized according to the disposition of the wisdom psalms (Seybold 1990:118). Seybold recognizes Psalms 9, 10, 25, 34 as psalms with a fixed formal structure, and also the free didactic poems, which have a variety of objectives (Pss 1, 19, 49, 73). Hurvitz (1988:41-51) analyses the vocabularies particular to wisdom literature and wisdom psalms and uncovers transliterate “turn from evil,” and the word “transliterate wealth.” This vocabulary approach identifies only four psalms as wisdom psalms (Pss 34:15, 37:27, 112:3 and 119). Crenshaw (2001:94) believes that few psalms treat the same topics that the author of Job enjoys.



b) Language (structural elements and characteristics)

Research suggests that “wisdom psalms all share the feature of offering advice for daily living” (Craven 1992:32). These psalms emphasize the choice of the way of righteousness over the way of wickedness. Craven (1992:32) summarizes these characteristics of wisdom as follows: the contrast between the just and the wicked; advice concerning conduct; fear of the Lord; the presence of comparisons and admonitions; alphabetic (acrostic) sequence of verses; “better” sayings; the address to a son; and the “blessed” (“ashre”) formula. Several features of wisdom psalms appear as often characterized by advice concerning behaviour, contrast between the wicked and the just, “better” or “happy” sayings; and inclusion of the “fear of the Lord” formula.

Gerstenberger (1988:20), in his discussion of the structure of wisdom psalms, draws attention to the fact that, the original wisdom elements are: proverbs, sayings, admonitions and prohibitions. Language in all wisdom psalms seems to be much more didactic and meditative than cultic songs. They are characteristically molded into larger patterns of speech that clearly show an instructional and exhortative intention.

While it is noted that the *Psalter* have some cultic prayers from synagogue congregations, Kuntz (1974:186-222) identifies four characteristics when he categorizes texts as wisdom psalms. This includes rhetorical elements, vocabulary, thematic elements, and forms.

In sum, most scholars<sup>34</sup> accept Psalms 1, 32, 34, 37, 49, 73, 112, and 128 as wisdom psalms. Several other psalms reflect wisdom elements.

c) Content and context

While wisdom psalms serve as models compelling worship and catechesis to challenge prevailing views of poverty, wealth and righteousness, Psalms 49 and 73 probe the problematic character of the amassing of wealth and its effects on both rich and poor. Psalm 37 offers a perspective that rises above mere charity. It presents the view that God takes action to vindicate those innocents who are in need.

Nevertheless, Psalms 37, 49, and 73 create a context that seriously grapples with disparities and the aspirations of the poor. In this regard these psalms depart from the received wisdom of Proverbs in constructive ways (Pleins 1993:169). They protest against the traditional wisdom paradigm of the retribution principle.

Psalm 73 is often regarded as the greatest of all the wisdom psalms (Anderson 1983:225). Also Brueggemann (1984:115) regards it as “the most remarkable and satisfying of all the psalms”. It is true that this psalm does have a special place in the Book of Psalms. The process of movement into, through and out of disorientation into a situation of new orientation is present in this psalm. Its content reflects “a mightily engagement with God, a struggle against God and a wondrous communion with God” (Brueggemann 1984:115).

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<sup>34</sup> They argued that this group of psalms reflect wisdom themes and vocabularies (Ceresko 1999:160-161). Although there is consensus among scholars that at least Psalms 1, 2, 34, 37, 49, 112 and 128 have their origin from the wisdom circles, other scholars have suggested that many other psalms are also part of the wisdom group.

McCann (1993:143) summarises the significance of Psalm 73 strikingly. It shows that "God reigns; we belong to God; no experience separates us from God; happiness or goodness means to live in dependence not upon oneself but by taking refuge in God".

Psalm 1 may have been originally intended as a prologue to the whole Psalter. At some time Psalm 2 was also known as 'the first Psalm' (see Acts 13:33). Its central doctrines, the blessedness of the godly life (verses 1-3) and the futility of godlessness (verses 4-6), are certainly characteristics of the psalmist's faith (Packer and Leaney 1977:16).

Wisdom psalms are not prayers as such but they are reflections on life and life's problems. They belong to a broad category of literature that seeks to instruct the reader on a particular issue or way of life (Bullock 2001:211). Psalm 112 stylistically has little to commend it as a wisdom psalm. Apart from the occurrence of the blessing formula in verse 1, this psalm pronounces that a "blessed" person fixes his/her sight on the blessings of the one who fears the Lord. Psalm 112 capitalizes on the life of the righteous rather than the life of the fool.

Psalm 127 represents an expression of faith that agrees with Solomon's great wisdom and his dependence upon God (I Ki 3 and 8). The use of proverbs in this poem (vv. 2, 3; see Prv 16:3, 9; 17:6) and the occurrence of wisdom admonitions (vv. 1-2, 3-5) are reasons in favour of its stylistic kinship to wisdom.

Psalm 128 is a companion psalm to Psalm 127 (Bullock 2001:211). Bullock describes the performance of Psalm 128 as reinforcing its

theme of children as the Lord's special blessing on the human family. Stylistically, Psalm 128 features the blessings of those who fear the Lord. It also opens with the "*blessed*" formula (v.1). Thematically this psalm continues the thought of Psalm 127 regarding children and the central place of the temple and the city (Zion) from where the Lord blesses Israel (vv. 5-6). The psalm presents a fuller picture of the blessing that accrues when the Lord is the Designer/Architect of the social order.

#### d) Functions

Worship should be understood as a life-style. Worship is the broad umbrella term that includes man's total life walk in his relationship with God. It is not limited to certain rituals and ceremonies, but in essence, it is synonymous to the believer's total life.

Wisdom psalms could therefore be read as an expression of Israel's guidelines to wise behaviour (Kosmala 1964:431). These psalms function didactically. They are meant to convince the believers to live wisely 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who practise it' (Ps 111:10). Psalm 1 in particular advises believers to reject folly and refrain from wicked behaviour.

### **2.2.2.7 Psalms of Trust**

#### a) Form

The Psalms of Trust fall into the categories of individual and community psalms (Murphy 1993:73). Those that articulate the

individual are Psalms 4; 16; 23; 27; 62 and 73, while the community Psalms of Trust include inter alia Psalms 90; 115; 123; 124; 125 and 126. Sentiments of trust occur in numerous psalms, but the expansive tone of trust characterizes this group of poems. These Psalms of Trust express the psalmist's trust in God. Sometimes the Hebrew root verb "*to trust*" or "*to have faith*" occurs to express this idea.

In addition to the language of faith, the psalmists use many metaphors and expressions to represent their sense of trusting, like lying down to rest (Ps 23:2) and to sleep (Ps 4:8), and enjoying safety in the presence of one's enemies (Ps 23:5). Metaphors depicting the Lord as light (Ps 27:1), as rock (Ps 62:2,6), and fortress or refuge (Ps 16:1; 27:1; 62:8), and walking in a straight path (Ps 27:11), are taken from the landscape of the psalmist's world. Individual Psalms of Trust in particular use the terms "tower", "fortress" and "refuge" to suggest height and security.

b) Language (structural elements and characteristics)

Generally Bullock (2001:169-170) structures prayers of trust as follows: the declaration of trust is the first and most important component of the individual and community Psalms of Trust. For example: For the individual: (Ps 4:3,8) "The Lord will hear when I call to him"; "I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O lord, make me dwell in safety". For the community: (Ps 90:1-2) "Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations".

A second element in the Psalms of Trust is the invitation to trust addressed to the community. This invitation is not always present, but

it does occur in Psalms 4:4,5; 27:14; and 62:8 (individual psalms of trust), and in Psalm 115:9-11 (community psalm of trust).

The third element of this group of psalms is the basis for trust; namely God. Sometimes the psalmist recounted a point of knowledge or an experience that had taught him a lesson of faith. Apart from the crisis that shaped his faith, the psalmist had discovered the basis of faith. He was well aware of the mountains that surrounded Jerusalem, and he had observed that the Lord's protection of Jerusalem was as constant and defensively certain as that geographical fact: "As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people both now and forever more" (Ps 125:2).

The theological tenets of the psalmist's faith taught him about the majesty of Yahweh, and that he could trust in him: "I lift up my eyes to you whose throne is in heaven" (Ps 123:1). And not only was he enthroned in heaven, but he was the Maker of heaven and earth, the Creator of the universe (Ps 124:8). This was enough to assure any troubled soul that God was powerful and could deliver from the most threatening circumstances.

A fourth element in the Psalms of Trust is petition. These are prayers of faith. The psalmist, for example, knows that God is a God of mercy, and that he can show mercy again (Ps 123:2-3).

In at least two instances a fifth element enters these psalms. The worshipper makes a vow or promise to praise the Lord (Pss 16:7; 27:66; 115:17-18). The promise arises out of the depths of his faith that God will hear his cry and come to his rescue.

A sixth element, and next to the declaration of trust, the most frequent component of the Psalms of Trust, is the interior lament. It is not a lament as such, but the remnant of one (Ps 48:7-8).

The six elements of the psalms of trust compose the texture of this group, even though they do not all occur with the same consistency. The declaration of trust and the interior lament are the consistently recurring elements.

c) Content and context

Many of the psalms of trust express a deep confidence in God and his goodness. Such expressions are numerous and can be found in various types of psalms. However the sentiment of trust dominates a few psalms and singles them out as special expressions of confidence in God (see for example Pss 16; 23 and 63).

Gerstenberger (1988:92) recognizes Psalm 16 as a singular confessional psalm of confidence. Apparently it once served in worship liturgies that purported to clarify the individual's affliction with the Yahwistic community.

Gerstenberger (1988:90) infers that the compact phrase "You are my Lord" is immediately augmented by a pleonastic title (v.2b). For Gerstenberger the phrase is elaborated with regard to its consequences for the supplicant (vv. 3-4) before it echoes again in a longer confessional statement (v.5).

Psalm 16 implies intense distress due to an unknown peril (Terrien 2003:177). In this psalm the psalmist has understood that death could not separate him from the divine lover. The God whom the poet loved, is the one in whom believers live, move and have their being.

Bullock (2001:171) and other biblical scholars<sup>35</sup> regard Psalm 23 as the best known and beloved text in the entire Psalter. Commentators such as Westermann (1989) and Bullock (2001) divide Psalm 23 in two parts: The Lord as Shepherd (vv. 1-4) and the Lord as Host (vv 5-6), while others insist that the shepherd imagery follows through the whole psalm. In particular Bullock (2001:171) found that the theology of this psalm arises out of the practice of life, the practice of the lowliest of occupations, shepherding sheep.

Gerstenberger (1988:16) suggests that the extremely personal tone of Psalm 23 excludes a royal and national use. He emphasizes that there is no reference to danger already overcome as is customary in thanksgiving songs. Instead, confidence and hope are articulated, especially in verse 6. Gerstenberger argues that Psalm 23 aims at re-establishing the personal relationship with God, especially within a ritual of petition for individual sufferers who were persecuted or ostracized.

Westermann (1989:128) approaches Psalm 23 from two perspectives, which are mutually dependent. Firstly, he suggests that Psalm 23 has a motif of the individual lament and the avowal of trust. Secondly, he proposes that all six verses belong to the motif of the avowal of trust.

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<sup>35</sup> For example Day (1990:53) maintains that Psalm 23, the best known of all psalms, depicts God's loving kindness under two images, those of the shepherd (vv. 1-4) and the gracious host (vv. 5ff).



Both Gerstenberger (2001:14) and Terrien (2003:462) share the conviction that liturgically, thanksgiving and trust form the gravitational center of Psalm 63. Terrien (2003:462), has shown that Psalm 63 is about a poet who has a thirst for God (vv. 2-4). He confirms that the poet exclaims at once on his longing for his sublime treasure. Terrien illuminates that the *Elohim* of transcendent breath and magnitude is the most intimate *EL*, "O God! Thou art my God!" Yet, the circumstances that surround such an exuberance are ominous. Whether the desiccated landscape is to be viewed literally or symbolically, the passionate seeking of "my God" is motivated by physical and moral exhaustion on the part of the singer.

#### d) Functions

The purpose of the Psalms of Trust is to give a faithful witness to the psalmist's trust in God. Bullock (2001:170) introduces several functions for the Psalms of Trust. Firstly they carry a tone of deep faith in God and his providence. For the most part, they arise out of some crisis in the psalmist's or Israel's life, a crisis whose hardship and testing shaped the psalmist's faith.

Secondly, these psalms often do not give evidence that the crisis has passed, but they exhibit the faith that can see the individual and the nation through the crisis.

Thirdly, Psalms of Trust are the girdles of the Psalter, for they crisscross the book with expressions of the faith of the Old Testament in its finest form.

Pleins (1993:46) endorses that the Psalms of Trust not only strengthen, comfort and encourage the worshipping community or the individual, but more importantly, they awaken in the worshipper a need or thirst for God as the comforter (Ps 63:2).

### **2.2.2.8 Imprecatory Psalms**

#### a) Form

Of particular trouble for Bible readers are those vengeful prayers that are described as "imprecatory psalms" (Craven 1992:50). These prayers invoke God because of a particular experience of calamity and request God to judge and punish the enemy harshly. About twenty psalms contain imprecatory elements. Nine of these focus almost entirely on calling God to afflict evildoers. Psalms 7; 35; 58; 59; 69; 83; 109; 137 and 140 are examples where psalmists pray to God<sup>36</sup> for the destruction or doom of others.

Because these psalms express the desire for God's vengeance on their enemies they are variously referred to as "Psalms of violence," "Psalms of vengeance," "Psalm of hate" and "Psalm of disorientation" (Murphy 1993:46). Psalm 109 is one of the most troublesome, if not the most uncomfortable text of imprecatory psalms. Ironically, it is one of the most loved passages among most indigenous African Christians (Craven 1992:51).

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<sup>36</sup> The following psalms or parts thereof are widely recognized and classified as imprecatory prayers: 5:10; 6:10; 7:6,9; 15-16; 9:19-20; 10:15; 17:13; 28:4; 31:17-18; 35; 4-6; 8: 19; 24-26; 40:14-15; 52:5; 54:5; 55:9; 15; 56:7; 58:6-10; 59:5; 11-13; 68:1-2; 30; 69:22-25; 27-28; 70:2-3; 71:13; 74:11; 22-23; 79:6; 10; 12; 83:9; 11; 13-18; 94:1-2; 104:35; 109:6-15; 17-20; 29; 129:5-8; 137:7-9; 139:19; 21-22; 140:8-11; 141:10; and 143:12 (Day 2002:166-186). There are a total of ninety-eight verses in thirty-two psalms.

b) Language (structural elements and characteristics)

These violent, vengeful sentiments may be embarrassments to modern day religious sensitivities, but they are not censored or silenced in the Psalter. Negative wishes or prayers are spoken with the hope that God will execute swift, harsh judgement against offenders. The psalmists do not sanitize their fierce desire for strict retribution. They pray for what they want. They express their bitterness and vindictiveness with the promise that once their own righteousness and God's justice are proven, they will praise their deliverance and God's sovereignty (Pss 35:12; 69:6 and 109:4-5).

Imprecatory psalms are wishes and prayers for destruction. Craven (1992:50) puts a great deal of emphasis on the petitions by the community. For example, "O God, break the teeth in their mouths" (Ps 58:6). He regards this prayer as an exemplary imprecation. Other expressions used included "Pour out your indignation upon them, and let your burning anger overtake them" (Ps 69:24), and Psalm 140 which asks God's protection from wicked, violent enemies with the petitions, "Let burning coals fall upon them! Let them be cast into pits, no more to rise!" (Ps 140:10). Many scholars have testified to the fact that the imprecatory psalms belong to some of the most troublesome parts of the Bible.

c) Content and context

The historical context of these wishes and prayers is one where people are threatened, endangered, injured and unjustly treated.

“... imprecations are almost like a valve to release pressure, a healthy way of controlling anger” (Craven 1992:52).

The believer’s part in this process is to risk a journey on a path whose destination will be known only in dialogue with God. If not the lectionary, they function to tell the whole of the psalmist’s story to God and community.

The attitude of the psalmists, that God is the avenger, is of particular importance in understanding what at first glance looks like unrestrained vindictiveness in these psalms. Rage is not pent up in the psalms. In prayer, rage is relinquished to God. It is God who decides how vengeance is to be executed.

Imprecatory psalms offer a platform from which oppressed people can request God’s fulfilment of His righteousness and justice. Although these psalms truly express humanness, it becomes an act of faith. Despite the injustice suffered it is left for God to respond, rather than the sufferer taking vengeance into his/her own hands. This action conforms to a *Pedi* wise saying and teaching, *tšohle di tsebjwa ke yo godimodimo* (everything is known by the one in heaven). It means everything is in God’s control.

#### d) Functions

The function of these imprecations is to illustrate how therapeutic prayer is, and that all life experiences could be brought before God. Admittedly, care must be taken in the use of the imprecatory psalms for evil intention. These wishes should be uttered for God’s vengeance

only. All pain experienced and their consequences must be submitted to God with humility and understanding that God is a righteous God, but that He is a God of vengeance who will do justice when justice is necessary no matter how long.

Anger which believers experience should not be ignored, eliminated, or stored up. Angry people are not driven from the community. As covenant partners Israelite believers are called to submit their lives to God and to relinquish unto God in real and irreversible ways the governance of the universe and their place in it.

These imprecations are indeed a reflection of what worshippers are. To most African Christians, there is nothing morally inferior or un-Christian in the imprecatory psalms. Praying the imprecatory psalms is an expression of the desire for an oppressor to be punished in proportion of the crime committed (Pss 109 and 137; see McCann 1993:117). To my mind there is nothing morally wrong in praying these psalms.

#### 2.2.2.9 Torah (Law) Psalms

##### a) Form

The Torah psalms, as the name suggests, focus upon the Torah with its multiple facets of theological expression. Only three psalms, Psalms 1; 19; and 119, can be called Torah psalms in the true sense of the word; that is, their major concentration is the Torah (Bullock 2001:214). Torah psalms do not comprise a literary genre of the psalms, since there is no standard literary genres. Bullock recognizes Psalms 18; 25; 33; 68; 78; 81; 89; 93; 94; 99; 103; 105; 111; 112;

147; and 148 as psalms dealing with the notion of Torah, although it is not their key idea.

On the other hand Day (1990:56-57) regards the Torah (law) psalms as a sub-category of wisdom psalms. Gerstenberger (2001:537) draws attention to the fact that Torah psalms focus on the Mosaic Torah as the only fountain of divine revelation and guidance. They reflect early Jewish community life and worship. The vocabulary of Torah ethics, such as "justice", "righteousness", and "truth", comes into prominence in these psalms as an expression of God's revelation of his will and character.

b) Language (structural elements and characteristics)

Psalms 119 appears to be monotonous. It repeats in many different ways the psalmist's devotion to the Torah. Ten different terms for the Torah are used throughout the psalm: eight major terms are employed, namely, commandment, statute and word (22 times each), judgement and testimony (23 times each), precept (19 times) and law or instruction (25 times).

The outline of God's will is primarily found in the Torah (Kraus, 1979:34). While the concept "law" is connected with the impression of something fixed, rigid, or static, this reference arouses the impression of something living and dynamic, in which directions, suggestions, commands, orders, and advice are imparted.

The Law (or Torah) includes God's promises to people and individuals. Psalmists often appeal to these promises like in Psalm 25:3.

Judgements also include acts of deliverance (Pss 39; 52; 73; 84 and 120; see Eaton 1995: 37).

Brueggemann (1984:39) rightly describes Psalm 119 as “a massive intellectual achievement”. The acrostic structure of this psalm, where every eight verses start with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet letter, testifies to genius. The central *theologoumenon* of Psalm 119 is Torah (Mays, 1994:383). Its text is the literary composition of a poet who wishes to make the Torah the “governing principle” of his life (Dahood, 1970:172). The psalm gives instruction in the “a-b-c’s” of obedience to the Torah. Burden (1991:174), calls this psalm the ABC of righteousness. This confirms that the Torah covers every aspect of man’s life in order to experience joy and prosperity. Man should know that life is reliable when the Torah is obeyed (Brueggemann, 1984:40). The symmetrical structure of Psalm 119 gives utterance to this feeling of safety and well-being. This is in contrast with Weiser (1962:739), who maintains that the formal character of the psalm stifles its subject matter.

c) Content and context

Biblical psalms have been preserved and treasured because they teach about God, and the life of faith in God. Instruction is not something that primarily takes place in a classroom. Torah (law) psalms have instructed the people of God as they have read and meditated upon them in private devotion. Above all, Israelites have been instructed as they have read and heard and sung the psalms in public worship. Liturgy is inevitably instructive. It shapes minds and hearts; it moves and transforms; it creates a new vision of reality.

Quite likely, the kind of Torah piety that brought the Psalter to its final form was the impetus for the instalment of Psalm 1 as the title text of the book (Bullock 2001:218). Meditation on the Torah was the key to the blessed life, and such a demeanor stamped the entire collection with its piety (Bullock 2001:218). The way the wicked is set stands in sharp contrast to the way of those who meditated on the Torah (vv. 1-2).

While some critics (Bullock 2001:219), believe that the Torah or the laws of Israel were written rather late, it is known that written codes of law were quite common in the ancient world. Psalm 119, with its prolific vocabulary of Torah, declares “blessed” those who “walk according to the law of the Lord” (v.1). This oral and written traditions of revelation are the source of the psalmist’s joy and knowledge of the Lord, even though the auxiliary modes also figure into the larger picture.

The all but invisible seam between God’s “ways” and his works of justice and goodness can be detected in Psalm 25:8-9. Psalm 111 uses the nouns “truth” and “justice” as complements to “precepts”: “The works of his hands are *faithful* and *just*; all his *precepts* are trustworthy” (v.7).

In the broad view, Torah and wisdom represent two paradigms of faith, with wisdom complementing and rephrasing the shape of faith, as found in Torah. For example, the perspective of Torah focussed on the nation of Israel, while that of wisdom was turned on the individual. Strangely the wisdom books of the Old Testament do not capitalize on history as the medium of divine revelation as do the Torah and the



prophets. God's revelation, in the view of the wisdom writers, is written in nature and in human conscience.

Psalm 19:8-15 explains the form as a combination of hymn (praise of the Law, related to the old forms which sang of God's thunder-voice, Ps 29, etc), and a more personal section (12-14) in the form of a lament (Eaton 1995:32). The sacrificial terms in verse 15 indicate that prayer has taken the place of sacrifice. In discussing the law-piety of the piece, Eaton explains the inner joy as fitting a time before the Law's requirements were swollen by the manifold additions of the scribes. At the time when the view of sin was not profound - the Law's requirements could be fulfilled and granted purification from unwitting errors.

#### d) Functions

There is nothing random or arbitrary in the commands of the Torah. They express the very order of existence for the Israelite community. The cosmic-life's own law and God's Torah are, at the deepest, one and the same. The Law is not only austere demand, but also the framework of God's revelation of the way to salvation.

Torah is not understood as a set of lifeless laws, as "do's and don'ts", but as life-giving instructions from God, which confirms his presence among humans. Torah must be understood here as the totality of God's self revelation to Israel and not as law in the strict sense of the word. The Torah is not a burden placed on the believer but a joyous expression in a believer's way of life.

Kraus (1979:39) supports this where he writes: "In Ps 119 *ist die Tora keine starre, statische Grosse, sondern lebenschaffende, schöpferische Macht*". This life-giving creative power of the Torah is explained by the fact that it comes from God. Leupold (1969:823) is therefore correct when he infers that Psalm 119 does not show the way for legalism. It is rather a way of experiencing life in freedom.

The Torah was, therefore, the delight of the poet's life, and the way that Yahweh had prescribed for his people to live. It was not a burden but a joy. No pleasure or activity could compare with the life of the Torah (Bullock 2001:225).

The purpose of the Torah was to build a life lived in accordance with the will of God revealed in his laws, and to build a secure and safe community. Through the Torah Yahweh has, therefore, provided a context of love in which he gave his Torah. Those who keep it find that its benevolent purposes meet life's aspirations and produce human happiness. In the context of threat and danger, the Torah can preserve the observant's life: "I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have preserved my life" (Ps 119:93).

Obedience to the Torah thus does not mean a life free from problems, but it provides those who worship God with the assurance of Yahweh's presence and faithful care in their lives. Knowledge of the Torah brings man to a position where he wants to praise Yahweh.

### **2.2.2.10 Psalms at festivals**

#### a) Form

The basic festivals of early Israel at which attendance at sanctuary by all males was required, were the Feasts of Unleavened Bread and Passover, Harvest (also known as Feast of Weeks or Pentecost), Ingathering (also known as Feast of Booths or Tabernacles) and the Feast of New Year. All these festivals were associated with the agricultural season. To appreciate properly the importance of the seasonal associations of these festivals, it is necessary to comment briefly on these festivals (Hayes 1976:16; Hunter 1999:236)

The Old Testament contains a number of passages which discuss these three festivals (Ex 23:14-17; 34:18-26; Lev 23; Deut 16:1-17). The earliest festivals in the spring were the Feasts of Unleavened Bread and Passover which were observed for seven days in the month of Abib (later, this month was called Nisan), which corresponds roughly to late March and early April. At the time of this festival, all the leavened food had to be thrown out and all leaven (yeast) removed from the homes (Hayes 1976:17).

In Judaism the Exodus from Egypt was particularly associated with the Passover. This association existed even in early times. The Passover was the main religious festival of the semi-nomads before the entry into Canaan. It is a true historical tradition which already in the most ancient records connects the Exodus with the Passover.

Hayes (1976:18) explains that the second major festival in Israel was the Feast of Harvest (Weeks or Pentecost) which was held seven

weeks after the beginning of the barley harvest. The feast was one day in length and coincided with the wheat harvest. In thus closed the season of harvest associated with the cereal crops.

The third major festival in Israel was celebrated in the fall, during the seventh month, which corresponds to late September and early October at the time of the ingathering of fruit, wine and oil. This festival was called the Feast of Ingathering, Booths or Tabernacles (Day 1990:67; Hayes 1976:18). This festival also occurred at the season just prior to the beginning of the autumn rains and the sowing of the new crops. During the Feast of the Tabernacles all male Israelites had to appear at the sanctuary, according to the pre-exilic sources (Exod 23:14-17; 34:22-23; Deut 16:16). In origin these were agricultural festivals which must have been appropriated from the Canaanites (Day 1990:67).

The special 'festival psalms' (Pss 120-134) were probably sung at the water-pouring rite on the great day of the festival (Tabernacles), i.e. the eighth day of celebration. At the feast of tabernacles, the singers used to stand on the fifteen steps leading from the court of the people to that of the women, and sing the fifteen festal songs, while two priests blew on horns from the gate behind them.

Day (1990:69) infers that during the above mentioned festivals psalms such as 47; 93 and 96-99 (the so called enthronement psalms) were sung then, as well as many others.

In post-biblical Judaism Yahweh's kingship was an important theme of the Jewish New Year festival (Day 1990:70). Passages about Yahweh's

kingship were recited on this day, including Psalms 93:1 (one of the enthronement psalms) and the related Psalm 24:7-10. Other verses recited are the *Shofaroth* (passages referring to the blowing of the *shofar* or ram's horn), which include verses from the two enthronement psalms (Pss 47:5 and 98:6) as well as the related Psalm 81:3.

Day (1990:70) analyses Psalm 29 with special reference to the Septuagint and indicates that the heading to Psalm 29 in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, connects the psalm with the Feast of the Tabernacles. Psalm 29 is a psalm pervaded by the theme of Yahweh's kingship (v.10) and is clearly related to the so-called enthronement psalms (vv. 3, 10 with Ps 93:3f; and vv.1f with Ps 96:7-9).

Festival psalms are principally hymns of praise with the usual character of such hymns, and with the free variations occasioned by their special theme (Mowinckel 1962:109). Furthermore, the main themes of these psalms are: the exhortation to praise, the mention of Yahweh's glorious presence and the excellent deeds he has performed or is about to perform.

b) Language (structural elements and characteristics)

Most festival psalms share characteristic features and a common structural pattern. The structure is comprised of the following elements: Firstly, the introductory exhortation or call to praise. Secondly, the main body of the hymn, which praises God for his

attributes and deeds. Thirdly, a concluding section expressing some wish, prayer or blessing (Hayes 1976:21).

Most commentators of the Psalms of Ascents have, however, indicated a step-like parallelism as an important and characteristic aspect of the collection. The phenomenon certainly persists in translation, though some instances are lost because of the change of word order involved (Hunter 1999:188). Psalm 132 appears to be the exception. The absence of a step-like parallelism could be a consequence of the different purpose of Psalm 132, and its far greater length.

Psalm 81 was probably intended for use in the great autumn Feast of Tabernacles where, among other things, the Law was read (Deut. 31:9-13) and people pledged their obedience to it. This accounts for the fact that it begins with a call to praise the Lord (vv.2-6) which is followed by a prophetic oracle. In this psalm God speaks to his people through the prophet (vv.7-17) (Mowvley 1989:183). Trudinger (2004:126) comments that Psalm 81:5 there is an undertone of a summons to obedience to the whole Torah, a connotation that is more fully developed in the second part of the psalm. The verse has an anticipatory as well as an explanatory force.

The call to worship is based on the fact that observation of the feast is enjoined by law, as one of the three great festivals which the Israelites celebrated: Unleavened Bread and Weeks in the spring and Tabernacles in the autumn (Exod 23:14-17; Lev 23; Deut 16:1-17). The mention of Joseph and Egypt in v.6 indicates that the Law was already regarded as ancient and going back to the time of the Exodus (Mowvley 1989:183). Goulder (1996:147-148) who comments that

Psalm 81 belongs surely with the Asaph collection, mentions that this is confirmed by the notion of Joseph for the people in v.6, as in Psalms 7:16; 78:67 and 80:2.

There are a number of striking structural features in Psalm 81. The psalm opens with a marked change of tone: there is celebration, joy and the sounding of music. But the psalm divides into two parts. The summons to festal rejoicing lasts five verses, and then gives way to a further homily (Goulder 1996:147-148). The density of structure encourages the reader to believe that God calls his people to hear, and to obey; he delivered them in Egypt and gave them his law; but they did not hearken, and he gave them up; if only they had listened, all would have been well. Psalm 81 warns believers against unfaithfulness.

Although the opening tone is so different from Psalms 77; 78; 79 and 80, Goulder (1996:147-148) maintains that the historical sermonizing is very similar. The preacher begins with the oppression in Egypt (see Ps 78) goes with the Exodus (as in Psalms 77; 78 and 80). He stresses the disobedience of the wilderness, again (as in Ps 78); and concludes that further deliverance is still possible. The call, 'Hear, O my people' (Ps 81), with its prophetic sounding challenge, is reminiscent of the similar charge in Psalm 50.

Trudinger (2004:173) has made an extensive comparison between Psalms 81 and 94. He states that both psalms concern relief from a painful situation afflicting God's people. Psalm 94 is an impassioned cry for help that leads to the assurance that God will intervene. In Trudinger's view Psalm 81 is, in a sense, God's answer to such plea.

Trudinger acknowledges the reality of the existence of a situation of oppression, but gives a different perspective for the cause of this situation.

Trudinger shows that whereas in Psalm 94 it is the oppressors who spurn God and lack understanding. In Psalm 81 Israel itself exhibits these traits (Pss 81:12-14; 94:7-8). Trudinger maintains that both psalms contain testimony to God's saving activity in the past. In Psalm 94, this takes the form of the personal testimony of the speaking voice (vv. 16-19), while in Psalm 81 it is drawn from the historical memory of the nation (vv. 6-7). While Psalm 94 calls on God to act thus again, Psalm 81 explains God's inaction. All these links illustrates a developmental continuity of thought between the two psalms.

c) Content and context

One of the main contributions of Mowinckel was the reconstruction of the New Year Festival, of which an important part was the Enthronement Festival of Yahweh (Mowinckel 1962:106-192); Rowley 1967:184-195). Mowinckel assigned a large number of psalms to this cultic festival, and it is this special emphasis on the New Year Festival which may well be one of the 'weaknesses' of his hypothesis.

Another contribution was made by Weiser (1962:23-52) who postulated a Covenant Festival of pre-monarchical origin, celebrated at New Year in the autumn. An essential aspect of this festival was the renewal of the Sinaitic Covenant and the cultic representation of the salvation history of the nation. In Weiser's view, the Covenant Festival of Yahweh provided the setting for the majority of psalms.



In a similar way, Kraus (1966:179-222) has drawn the readers' attention to the Royal Zion Festival in which the election of David and of Jerusalem played an important role.

The basic religious festivals in Israel, of which attendance at the sanctuary by all males was required, were the Feasts of Unleavened Bread, Harvest (also known as Feast of Weeks or Pentecost), and Ingathering (also known as Feast of Booths or Tabernacles). Hayes (1976:16) observes that these festivals were associated with agricultural season.

These major Israelite festivals formed the background and cultic setting not only of most of the national psalms but also of the majority of the psalms of the individual. The three pilgrimage festivals may have been the only occasions when most of the Israelites had the opportunity to worship in the temple or at the sanctuary.

#### d) Functions

Festival Psalms were used in different contexts and for different purposes. For example:

**Passover:** Numerous psalms and many hymns of praise were used for Israel's Egypt experience from Egypt, her possession of the land of Canaan, and God's care, provision and protection of and gifts to his people, as well as for offering thanksgiving for the new harvest (see Exod 12 on Passover and Exod 23:15 on the Feast of Unleavened Bread).

The purpose of these festivals were therefore, two-fold. On the one hand, the message conveyed by these psalms was about the harvest and new crops. On the other hand, they stressed the great redemption experienced by Israel in the Exodus from Egypt (Hayes 1976:17). On the whole Nasuti (2005:334) points out that these psalms serve both to actualise the past and to anticipate the future. Thus, the function of these psalms was to celebrate, to thank as well as to relieve experiences in the cult.

Psalms connected to the Harvest festival in Autumn (September/October) were used to celebrate the Ingathering of fruit, wine and oil. They were also sung during the two festivals held in spring, namely the feast of Unleavened Bread (which came to be associated with Passover) to celebrate the barley harvest in March/April. The chanting of these psalms were also heard in May/June celebrating the feast of Weeks (or Pentecost) at the time of the wheat harvest. In origin Autumn festival psalms were meant for agricultural festivals which must have been appropriated from the Canaanites (Day 1990:67; Goulder 1996:149).

**New Year Festival:** Traditionally psalms connected to the New Year festival were sung to celebrate the grape harvest but there were possibly other elements involved including a symbolic humiliation, death and rising of the king representing the death and rising of the rain-giving god or more likely, of the people whose life was threatened by the heat and drought of the summer months (Mowvley 1989:2-3).

During the procession into the Temple, Mowvley has observed that they served to celebrate and reaffirm the Kingship of the Lord and his

authority over the whole earth. Several of them contain the words 'The Lord is King' (Pss 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1). The phrase may simply be a statement about God's authority which could be used on any occasion. However, the fact that it is similar to the acclamation made at the coronation of two human kings, Absalom (2 Sam 15:10) and Jehu (2 Ki 9:13) has led many to the conclusion that there was a ceremony as part of the Feast of Tabernacles in which the Lord's kingship was reasserted each year.

Mowvley (1989:2-3) maintains that the Israelites employed these psalms to express their deep feelings which they and their contemporaries experienced in the varied circumstances of life. The celebration of the Kingship of Yahweh was an important part of the ancient Israelite feast of Tabernacles/New Year (Day 1990:74; Mowinckel 1962:106-192; Rowley 1967:184-195).

With the transfer of New Year to an independent day, Goulder (1996:149) notes that New Year festival's psalms were sung to close the long summer, pray for the autumn rains, and primitively for the perseverance of light through the winter.

### **2.2.2.11 Liturgical Psalms**

#### 2.2.2.11.1 Entrance liturgies

##### a) Form

"Entrance liturgies" have to do with liturgical worship or activity (Craven 1992: 31). Craven has shown that in a single suggestive of possible liturgical parts, Psalm 15 opens with a liturgical question about who may be admitted to the temple. The psalm continues with

the answer (v.2) that those who come into God's presence should be blameless with regard to sins of the tongue and the abuse of wealth.

Probably we are dealing here with a pilgrim or worshipper. Psalm 24 contains a similar question: "Who shall be allowed to stand in God's holy place?" Then the answer (v.4): one with clean hands and a pure heart will be allowed to enter the gates of the king of glory. This format links closely with what can be described as a characteristic of entrance liturgies (Craven 1992:31). Anderson (1972:40) recommends entrance liturgies (Pss 15 and 24), which may have been used by pilgrims wishing to enter the temple as the mere important classes.

b) Language (structural elements and characteristics)

Structural elements and characteristics of entrance liturgies have been rehearsed by commentators such as Gerstenberger (1988); Day (1990); Terrien (2003) and others. In particular Gerstenberger (1988:88) has observed that genre classification of Psalm 15 depends more than usual upon social and cultic localization. In Gerstenberger's (1988:117) view, Torah instruction is an element familiar from Psalm 15; 24 and Isaiah 33:14-16. These texts show the same structure: question, answer and confirmation (promise), but with sufficient modifications to exclude literary dependency. Day (1990:60) claims that Psalm 15 is the only psalm which in its entirety may be said to constitute an entrance liturgy. His theory is concerned with the same structure as found in both Psalms 15 and 24:3-6 and, by way of prophetic imitation, in Isaiah. 33:14-16. Day (1990:60) showed that the structure consists as follows: Firstly, there is a question about who may be admitted to the temple (Pss 15:1; 24:3; cf Isa 33:14).

Secondly, there is an answer setting out the ethical requirements (Pss 15:2-56; 24:4-5; cf Isa 33:15). Thirdly, there is a word of blessing with regard to those who are qualified to enter the temple (Pss 15:5c; 24:6; cf Isa 33:16).

Terrien (2003:247) provides convincing evidence of a relationship between cultic worship and devotion. He asserts that cultic worship may offer psychological encouragement for high morality, but it cannot be a substitute for inner and total devotion. Terrien (2003:247) further argues that, whereas Psalm 15 considered the qualification for residence in the sacred tent (v.1), the poet of Psalm 24 insists on a profound aspect of the human personality. The devotee who shall climb the hill of the Lord will have to remain standing in the holy place (v.3). A hidden tension persists between the question and the answer.

### c) Content and Context

In Psalm 15 admission rituals are intended to protect the community from ritual or moral impurity that might anger God (Gerstenberger 1988:89). Psalm 15 reveals the theological insights of the early Jewish congregations (cf Isa 33:14-16; 58:1-2; Mic 6:6-8).

Whereas Psalm 15 as a whole is an entrance liturgy, Psalm 24:3-6 forms part of a larger liturgical piece involving a procession into the temple with the Ark, the symbol of Yahweh the divine king (vv. 7-10), who has been victorious over the chaos waters at creation (vv. 1-2). As such, it has its setting at the celebration of Yahweh's enthronement as king probably at the feast of the Tabernacles. Day (1990:60)

proposes that whatever the date of Psalm 15, Psalm 24 is certainly pre-exilic, as is shown by its reference to the Ark. The emphasis in this text is on ethical rather than ritual qualifications. Clearly, the moral qualities enumerated must represent typical virtues rather than constituting the sum total of those required.

In Psalm 15 the ethical requirements appear to be ten in number (vv, 2-5b), which calls to mind the character of the Decalogue. Similar requirements are attested elsewhere in the Ancient Near East with regard to those who seek entrance to the sacred temples, though there ritual qualifications are also sometimes included (Day 1990:61).

In a broad sense the term liturgies would include practically the entire Psalter, since so many psalms play a role in the temple liturgy either by origin or by application (Murphy 1993:12). However, it is a useful term to designate certain psalms in which choral recitation is made explicit.

The question and answer style of Psalms 15 and 24:3-6 is typical of these kind of psalms. They are not a kind of catechism; they seem to be entrance (or "gate") liturgies, a profession of faith upon entering the Temple to serve the Lord. Murphy's imitations of this genre also appear in Isaiah 33:14-16 and Micah 6:6-8. His observations show that analysis of the structure of entrance liturgies will reveal the respective roles of Temple personnel and the faithful.

d) Functions

In the case of liturgical texts, the primary purpose is obvious. Liturgies serve to regulate and to order the course of a service of worship intelligently and in accordance with worship ritual(s) (Seybold 1990:99-100). Seybold noted that liturgies reflect different phases of the coronation ritual, which bring together in the anointing and enthronement of the newly inaugurated ruler various elements of tradition such as the rights of kings, the covenant of David and the latter's adoption as a son of God. Entrance liturgies shape minds and hearts of worshippers; but also create a new vision of reality (McCann 1993:21).

Entrance liturgies like Psalms 15 and 24, could have served to prepare worshippers before they entered into the holy temple (Crenshaw 2001:85). They guarded against transgression of holy ground by unclear or immoral visitors. Therefore the entering visitor should reflect on his inner attitude or belief.

Along the lines of ethics, liturgical psalms challenge a kind of piety, prevalent even in our day, that lifts up the name of God but avoids tangling with questions of suffering and injustice. It keeps the believer aware of his/her own religious intentions.

#### **2.2.2.11.2 Judgement liturgies**

a) Form

Some psalms reflect a change of speaker, in which some give voice to prophetic interests, while others concentrate on the Torah; see for example Psalms 50; 81; 82 and 95 (Crenshaw 2001:82).

b) Language (structural elements and characteristics)

God, by means of a cultic official, speaks a word of judgement to an assembly in psalms of this type (Craven 1992:30; Crenshaw 2001:82). In Psalm 82, God judges the gods in the heavenly council because of their unjust and partial behaviour (vv 1-2). Also in Psalms 50, 81 and 95, God indicts the people assembled for worship (Craven 1992: 31).

*“Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee:  
O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me” (Ps 81:9).*

Gerstenberger (2001:110) found that the text was probably introduced by a call to attention “Listen, my people,” (Ps 81:9). He explored the relationship between Psalm 81:9 and Deuteronomy and has observed that in content and style the text is very much like Deuteronomy’s speech “Listen, Israel, Yahweh, our God, is the only God” (Deut 6:4; cf. 5:1; 9:1; 20:3). This is the famous central text of Judaism that constitutes a close parallel to verses 9-10. The only difference is that while in Deuteronomy the human intermediary, Moses, remains visible at all times, Psalm 81:6-16 as well as 50:7-23 and 95:8-11 have God speak for himself (Gerstenberger 2001:110). The cultic or prophetic functionary communicating the message does not introduce himself, nor does he become very transparent.



Psalm 95 opens similarly with a song of the people (vv. 1-7a) and continues with an admonishment from God that the people should hearken to his voice (vv. 7b-11). Judgement liturgies contain elements of the laments, whereas prophetic liturgies have a warning, often in oracular form, by means of which the liturgist summons the congregation to conduct its life in accordance with Yahweh's will (see for example Pss 50; 81; 82 and 95).

c) Content and Context

Considering structure and themes, as outlined above, and comparing some close parallel texts like Psalms 50, 75 and 95, Gerstenberger (2001:111) argues that there should be little doubt about this genre classification, even though it does not coincide completely with literary typology. In supporting his argument, he cites Psalm 81, where the homily proper starts with an introduction (vv. 5-6b), giving the reference point for all Jewish preaching. Unusual, then, is the explicit legitimation to speak up in the first person of God (v. 6c). He says, ("I removed the burden from their shoulders; their hands were set free from the basket"). Gerstenberger is convinced that this audition formula clearly does not belong to prophetic traditions but could derive from sapiential discourse (see Ps 62:12). Gerstenberger affirms that various elements of the divine allocution in their present order emphasize liberation from bondage (vv. 7-8), the exclusiveness of Yahweh worship (vv. 9-11), a statement of failure (vv. 12-13), and a fervent appeal to renew relationship with Yahweh (vv. 14-17). The direct address of the community always in the second person singular, is present only in vv. 8-11 and 17b.

d) Functions

Judgement liturgies kept together those faithful Israelites who entered the covenant with Yahweh; summon all the world and even heaven; stabilize and orient the new community of the faithful that is gathering on the basis of, and in active confrontation with, the old tradition (Gerstenberger 1988:210).

Furthermore, judgement liturgies played a prominent role in mediating on the fate of Israel's earlier existence in order to warn the actual generation of pitfalls and temptations along the way. Through the singing or recitation of judgement liturgies the history of the people as well as the testimony of the Torah encourage hope, thanksgiving, and trust in Yahweh (e.g. Ps 95:1-7b).

### **2.2.2.12 Creation Psalms**

a) Form

Several psalms or parts thereof, for example, Psalm 66:5-7 declare the "works" of Yahweh as his works of creation. The heavens are the works of his hands (Pss 8:3; 19:1; 102:25). All the creatures were formed by his creative acts (Ps 95:5) and the heavens (Ps 33:6) by his word. The distinctive term which in the Old Testament designates only Yahweh's acts of creation, the verb ("to create") is found several times in Psalms 89:12, 47; 104:30; 148:5.

"Creation" is an act of God. Yahweh's relationship to all that was created, is determined by the fact that He as Creator has established a reality which is distinguished from himself. He is active in creation (Ps

104) and preserves it. God is not the creation, he is the Creator. Creation psalms are also kinds of hymns or songs of praise, in which God is praised for his work.

b) Language (structural elements and characteristics)

The Psalter expresses the Lord's creation and gives four ways by which God created: (1) by his Word or command, (2) by his personal deed, (3) by his attribute of wisdom or understanding, and (4) by his strength (Bullock 2001:127).

Creation by the Word or command: the unique verb "to create", used also in Genesis 1, appears in Psalm 148:5b-6 in conjunction with the verb "he commanded". The noun "word" does not occur in the Genesis narrative either, but it is evident that it is the Word of the Lord that brings creation into existence. For example, God commanded and the sun, moon, stars, and waters were created (Ps 148:5-6). That is the way Psalm 33:6 puts it: "By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth".

The same psalm uses the verb "to speak" parallel with the verb "command", recognizing the synonymy of the two ideas: "For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm" (v.9). It is God who made heaven and earth and whose name is majestic in the entire world. In a mythological way, Psalms 74 and 89:5-12 tell of God's conflict with the forces of creation that were honoured in the surrounding nations. Yahweh created the world, heaven and earth by his word (Ps 33:6,9).

Creation by deed: the second way of describing God's creating activity, by his deed, is found in Psalm 147:4. Here the Lord brings the stars into existence and calls them each by name as he takes his inventory: "He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name". The anthropomorphism of Genesis 2 lies behind this description. The Lord's personal interest in his creation can be seen in his naming of the stars, an activity that also suggest his authority over the creation (Gen 2:19-20; 3:20).

Creation by wisdom and understanding: in wisdom thought, the terms "wisdom" and "understanding" are virtually synonymous. Just as Proverbs describes wisdom as God's *craftsman* in creating the world (Pr 8:30), the terms "wisdom" and "understanding" occur in parallel fashion to describe the creating activity of God in Proverbs 3:19: "By wisdom the Lord laid the earth's foundations, and by understanding he set the heavens in place"

Psalm 104, a creation hymn, describes creation in wisdom terms:

"How many are your works, O Lord!  
In wisdom you made them all;  
the earth is full of your creatures" (v.24)

In this psalm there is an ethical connection between God's *steadfast love* and his creation. The creation experiences the nature of the Creator. According to Psalm 145, the same link exists between the Lord's righteous nature and the relationship to his creation:

The Lord is righteous in all his ways  
and loving toward all he has made (v.17)

Creation by power: Jeremiah uses three instrumental ideas to describe creation: by power, by wisdom, and by understanding (Jer 51:15). While all three concepts do not occur together in the Psalms, power and understanding do occur in different contexts. In Psalm 65 the brute strength of the Creator becomes the instrument by which the Lord brought the mountains into existence.

The Hebrew participial noun that stands behind *Maker* is derived from the word "to do" or "to make", and introduces the creation narrative of Genesis 2 (v.4b): "When the Lord God made the earth and the heavens". This term suggests the deed-creation of that narrative.

Two other characteristics regarding the Creator and the creation occur in the Psalms of praise. One is the sheer beauty of creation, lauded by the psalmist in the immortal language of Psalm 8:

O Lord, our Lord,  
how majestic is your name  
in all the earth! (v.1)

Psalm 8 also mediates thanksgiving. It bridges the expression of thanks at the end of Psalm 7 with the thanksgiving Psalm 9, building together a strong, thankful conclusion to this group of psalms, Psalms 7-9 (Rendtorff 2005:56).

This well known hymn (Psalm 8) begins and ends on a note of universal praise to God. It implies, not that all men recognize his presence and power, but that he has universal significance. While the central section is concerned with the place of man in the scheme of things, Mowvley (1989:22) confirms that on the one hand it describes his relationship with God. The psalm also sets out man's relationship with the rest of the created world.

Psalm 8, like Genesis 1-3, is connected to a pattern of creation myths, connected to Egypt and Mesopotamia (Hunter 1999:120). The refrain in the psalm ("O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"), and the central question 'What are human beings?', sets up a reflective structure which suggests a use of the creation myth in an analogous, though not identical, fashion to its use in Genesis.

c) Content and context

Creation includes the whole range of existing things, from humans to ants, the abyss and Leviathan (Carm and Murphy 1998:36). This is the world open to human experience (or to human imagination, in the case of Leviathan).

Job admonishes the three friends to learn from beasts and birds, from reptiles and fish, the agency of the Almighty in all that happens (Job 12:78). Similarly, the sage draws on the animal world to underline the lessons to be learned in life (Prov 6:6-8; 30:15-31). Creation speaks, and its language is peculiar (Ps. 19). It is not verbal, but it is steady, and it is heard (Ps 19:2). It is parallel to the Torah, which 'gives wisdom to the simple' (Ps 19:8). The Lord allowed creation to do the

speaking for him according to Job 38-41 ('will the lightnings say to you, "Here we are?" (see Job 38:35; also Carm and Murphy 1998:36).

While the liturgy indeed represented the saving events of Israel's history, creation was a telling witness of the highlights and troughs of daily life, in which God hid his face (Ps 13:2; 104:29) but also showed it (Ps 31:17; 80:20; see Carm and Murphy 1998:36).

The psalms are not concerned with when history began. In the Psalter Creation marks the boundary line between the divine and the human orders. God, the Creator, establishes the boundary in such a way that his existence is intertwined with the created order (Ps 104:1b-4). The psalmist understands quite well that the Creator not only brought the world into existence, but the world is an expression of himself (Bullock 2001:100-101). Creation is a metaphor of his being. Thus, "the heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Ps 19:1). And the reciprocal transaction is expected, that humanity should reflect his character: "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer (Ps 19:14). Cult and liturgy is the context in which the Psalms praise God's power, recognize his strength and celebrate his creation deeds.

#### d) Functions

Creation psalms illustrate Yahweh's omnipotence (Kraus 1979:45). They celebrate the salvation or saving intervention of God in Israel's history: from the patriarchs, to the beginning of the monarchy to the divided kingdoms and their eventual destruction, and to the return of the exiles from Babylon (Murphy 1993:45). These psalms praise the

Lord's steadfast love and faithfulness. In this community the Lord is clearly praised for creation by word (Ps 33:6-9).

Bullock (2001:126) introduces several functions for creation psalms. Firstly, they praise God for his loving care as a shepherd and for his protection as a fortress. Secondly, these psalms often point to creation, historical events, Yahweh's universal reign, and his awesome deeds. Thirdly, they serve to fix the believers' eyes upon the exalted realities, those that can transfer their majesty to the things of earth and transform the shepherd into a God-figure, make the sheep God's people, and transfigure the pasture into the life with God.

These psalms do inform the reader from time to time how central praise is in expressing faith. God is enthroned on (or inhabits) the praises of Israel, another way of informing the reader how very close he is to the person of faith.

Furthermore, these psalms of praise, extol the Lord for what he has done in creation and history. Creation psalms were chanted or read in the Israelite cult to celebrate God's creation of the world, and his reign as King over Israel and the nations. In these texts, the psalmists praise God's goodness in creation and preservation.

### **2.3 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

From the above discussion it would seem that different psalms reflect certain perspectives on the created world. There are several kinds of psalms. Each has its own function as may be observed in the following figure.



**FIGURE NO. 2.1: ELEMENTS OF ANALYSIS**

			<b>G</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>S</b>		
<b>ELEMENTS OF ANALYSIS</b>	<b>Praise</b>	<b>Thanksgiving</b>	<b>Lament</b>	<b>Royal</b>	<b>Zion</b>	<b>Wisdom</b>	<b>Trust</b>	<b>Imprecatory</b>	<b>Torah</b>	<b>Festival</b>
<b>Form</b>	Psalms of praise celebrate God and his attributes of creation sustaining and controlling history. Generally, they include exhortation, praise and wish or prayer.	Thanksgiving psalms are intended to provide testimony concerning the saving work of God. They are divided into communal and individual Thanksgiving.	Laments arise out of situations of frustrations, fearfulness, calamity and defeat. They reflect the petitioners attitude of protestation and unrestrained complaint towards Yahweh. They also comprise petition for God's intervention in prevailing situations of distress.	Royal psalms consist of two sub-groups, namely, Psalms about the earthly king and Yahweh as king. Psalms of the earthly king focus on aspects of kingship such as inauguration, weddings and other experiences. Yahweh is king psalms on the other hand appraises ascribed to God for his greatness. They also act as means of re-orientation after collapse of the kingdom.	Songs of Zion derive their classification from the central theme of Zion the city of God. Zion symbolizes the dwelling place of God which offers refuge for threatened people of God. Primarily these songs implicitly praise God.	Wisdom psalms are identified as such due to their central theme or motive of warning against wickedness and promoting wise behaviour. This is underpinned by the fear of Yahweh.	Psalms of trust are situated in the psalmist's landscape which is pervaded by danger and enemies. They represent a tone of trust and God amidst dire situation metaphorically	Imprecatory psalms invoke God because of a particular experience of calamity and request God to judge and punish the enemy harshly. They are variously referred to as "Psalms of violence", "Psalms of vengeance", "Psalms of hate" and "Psalms of disorientation" because they express the desire for God's vengeance on their enemies.	Occasionally, Torah psalms are identified as a sub-category of wisdom psalms. However, they have a distinct regard for the Torah with its multiple facets of theological expressions.	These psalms are cast against the backdrop of Israel's major religious festivals, namely, Unleavened Bread, Passover, Harvest and Tabernacles. Festival psalms are principally hymns of praise. They mention Yahweh's presence and excellent deeds.
<b>Language</b>	Structurally, hymns of praise exhibit the following characteristics: call on Yahweh, summons to	Since Thanksgiving is the consequence of God's response to petition,	Laments are characterized by the following structural elements: address to God, complaints,	Psalms of the earthly king distinctively portray a language descriptive of the king. The king is	Central to the songs of Zion is the concept of God's power revealed in creation,	Wisdom psalms commonly feature advice for daily living. This is achieved by	Generally, psalms of trust exhibit the following structure: declaration of trust,	Imprecatory psalms are characterized by sentiments of violence and vengeance. They	The emphasis on the Torah in this group of psalms is exemplified by the use of similitudes	Festival psalms share the following characteristic features: call to praise, hymn, concluding wish,

	praise, praise of Yahweh for his works and qualities.	therefore it follows that these elements are exhibited: invitation to give thanks, accounts of trouble in salvation, acknowledgement of God's saving work, blessings over the congregation and exhortations.	confession of trust, petitions, assurance and vow to praise.	referred to as the anointed One, Messiah and Lord. In contradistinction Yahweh-is-King psalms reflect God's reign. Thematically God is depicted as Creator, Judge, King of the whole earth and shepherd of his people.	deliverance from exile and the rule from Zion. Through metaphorical language the psalmist illustrate Zion as the place of refuge.	contrasting the just from the wicked, comparisons, admonitions, acrostics and formulaic language such as blessed and the address to one son.	invitation to trust, basis of trust, petition, vow to praise and declaration of trust.	negatively portray wishes against the victims' adversaries.	such as commandment, statute, judgement, testimony precept, law and instruction. Torah psalms also convey promises of experiences of joy and prosperity to the obedient.	prayer or blessing. Moods of celebration, joy and the sounding of music are deeply imbedded in this group of psalms.
<b>Content &amp; Context</b>	Hymns tell about God. Through theological proclamation they draw the hearers into worship. Simultaneously, God's magnificence and great acts are announced.	It arises out of experienced outcome of Yahweh's power. Thanksgiving reflects confidence in God's intervention, affirms that he hears and answers petitions.	Laments grew out of situations of crises either in an individual's life or communally. They indicate faith in God. Structurally, laments portray regular features of address, confidence, and petition and vow to praise.	Royal Psalms emphasize the relationship between the king and God. Reference is made to historical figures in Israelite history.	These psalms glorify Zion God's abode. Songs of Zion are associated with great festivals and entrance ceremonies.	Contextually, Psalms of wisdom grapple with disparities in life and the plight of the poor. They raise matters surrounding a life centred on godly living and blessedness.	Psalms of trust express a deep confidence in God and his goodness.	Historically imprecations are grounded in contexts of threat, endangerment and injustice. The petitioner therefore, seeks God's assistance and vengeance against his adversary.	Torah psalms teach God's people about life and faith. Instructions are relayed to the worshipper through meditation on Torah. Moreover through hearing and reading Torah psalms Israel is instructed in the way of the Lord.	Psalms of festivals are grounded in the major New Year Festival. All male Israelites were required to converge at the Temple in Jerusalem for the Feasts of Unleavened Bread, Harvest and Ingathering.
<b>Function(s)</b>	Hymns extol God, his character, justice and great works. They teach	Thanksgiving demonstrates that God hears prayer. It employs	They reflect authentic expression to life experiences, show that	Royal psalms celebrate various occasions in the life of the ruler such as	These songs raise an awareness of peace, protection	Wisdom psalms belong to a broad literary genre focusing on	They witness to the psalmists trust in God and his providence	Imprecations demonstrate how therapeutic petition is.	Its purpose is build life in accordance with God's will. Yahweh	Numerous psalms were sang in commemoration of God's care

	worshippers to comprehend who they are as they reflect on God.	language rooted in human suffering. Individuals are encouraged to share their experiences with the broader community. Ultimately, it is a response to God's salvation acts.	worship and faith are shaped by life, witness to robust faith amidst calamity and lead to petition.	weddings, coronations, preparation for battle and ritual enactments. Through the king God's justice is extended. Functions- Principally they declare God's greatness. They stress his kingship figuratively represented by Davidic kingship. They demonstrate desire to see God's universal rule.	and war. Songs of Zion point to communal and universal peace. Fundamentally, they are concerned about Jerusalem's ability to survive attack.	guidelines to wise behaviour. They are didactic espousing the fear of the Lord.	during crises. They arouse a quest for God in the worshipper.	Equally they illustrate trust in the justice of God.	expresses his love to his people in the Torah. An observant worshipper's life is thus ordered in God's way.	and protection exemplified by the Egyptian experience and subsequent deliverance. Other themes are possession of Canaan, harvest of fruits, wine and oil and other crop. God's rule over the earth is a key theme at the New Year celebration.
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Following a closer look at the various types of psalms found in the Old Testament, it is now appropriate to investigate some of the types of psalm-like texts found in the Pedi culture. This will be the issue under consideration in the next chapter and forms the core of this study and contribution.