

‘The honour of the righteous will be restored’: Psalm 75 in its social context

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ABSTRACT

Psalm 75 is often assumed to be a psalm of thanksgiving. Others regard it as part of a cultic liturgy celebrating God's judgement on evildoers. But few researchers have recognised the important role played by the social values of honour and shame in the psalm. It is argued in this paper that it is not possible to understand the text as an instrument of communication if the social context is not taken into consideration. The psalm is analysed on a poetic and a social-critical plane. It seems that the purpose of this text was to confirm the belief of a group of Israelites in the power and willingness of Yahweh to intervene on their behalf. As such it also constitutes a prayer that the national honour of this group of believers will be restored.

A INTRODUCTION

Psalm 75 has been interpreted from different perspectives and in various ways. Depending on the angle of approach, a number of different propositions have been made regarding its literary type,¹ setting,² time of origin,³ and meaning. Nevertheless, it seems that the full potential of analysing its social context has not yet been exploited. The metaphor of a horn that is ‘raised’ or ‘chopped off’ seems to be an important strategy used by the author to communicate with a certain audience. It is contended in this article that the ‘horn’ primarily symbolises the social values of honour and shame in this psalm and that these social values form a code that cannot be ignored in the interpretation of the text.

The method that will be followed here in an attempt to interpret the psalm anew includes a poetic analysis of the text, but focuses on its social context. The questions asked by the social-critical approach in the exegesis of biblical texts will be used in this attempt. The results of such a social-critical reading will be compared with those obtained by the historic-critical and ritual interpretations that have dominated the study of the Psalms for a long time.

¹ According to Anderson (1981:547) its classification is problematic because it consists of ‘heterogeneous elements’. See the discussion at the end of this article.

² It is usually described as a collective hymn or psalm of thanksgiving with oracular elements by a priest or cultic prophet (Anderson 1981:547). Eaton (1976:55-56), however, sees in it a king speaking on behalf of the community and for God.

³ Suggested times of composition range from the time of Asa to the early period of the Maccabean struggle (166-164 B.C.). Cf. Ridderbos (1958:267) and Treves (1988:64-65).

B STICHOMETRIC ANALYSIS

				למנצח אל־תשחח	1a	To the conductor. 'Do not destroy.' ⁴
				מזמור לאספֿה שיר:	b	A Psalm of Asaph. A song.
I	A	1	3	הודינו לך־אלהים	2a	We thank you, O God,
			3	הודינו וקרוב שמך	b	we give thanks, ⁶ and close is your name.
			2	ספרו נפלאותיך	c	They relate your wonderful deeds.
II	B	2	3	כי אקח מועד	3a	'At the time I appoint,
			3	אני מישרים אשפט:	b	I will judge with fairness.
		3	3	ובגים ארץ וכל־ישביה	4a	The earth and all its inhabitants are in turmoil,
			3	אנכי תכנתי עמודיה סלה:	b	But I have firmly established its pillars. Selah.
	C	4	3	אמרתי להוללים אל־תהללו	5a	I said to those who boast: "Don't boast!"
			3	ולרשעים אל־תרימו קרן:	b	And to the wicked: "Don't raise a horn!"
		5	3	אל־תרימו לפרום קרנכם	6a	Don't raise your horn so high;
			3	תדברו בצוואר ענק:	b	Or speak arrogantly in the neck.'
III	D	6	4	כי לא ממוצא וממערב	7a	For neither from the east nor the west,
			3	ולא ממדבר הרים:	b	nor from the desert ⁷ comes uplifting;
		7	2	כי־אלהים שפט	8a	but God is the judge
			4	וה ישפיל וזה ירים:	b	Who brings one low and exalts another.
	E	8	3	כי כוס ביד־יהוה	9a	For a cup is in the hand of Yahweh
			4	וינון חמר קלא מסך	b	and the wine foams up full of spices;
			2	ונגר מנה	c	and he pours from it.
		9	2	אד־שקריה ימצו	d	Even to the dregs will they drain it out,
			3	ישתו כל רשעי־ארץ:	e	They will drink, all the wicked of earth.
IV	F	10	3	ואני אגיד לעלם	10a	But I, I will proclaim for ever,
			3	אזמרה לאלהי יעקב:	b	I shall sing to the God of Jacob,
		11	3	וּכְל־קרני רשעים אגדע	11a	and all the horns of the wicked I ⁸ will chop off;
			3	הרו־מקנה קרנות צדיק:	b	but the horns of the righteous will be lifted up.'

There seems to be four stanzas in the poem (I-IV), embracing six strophes (A-F). The first stanza (simultaneously the first strophe, IA) has as its theme the praises of the

⁴ According to Gunkel (Gunkel-Begrich 1933 [1985]: 457), the text should be changed to על־תשחח and translated with 'nach der Tachschtischen'. He has the name Tahas from Gen 22:24 in mind.

⁵ The *lamed* is supplied with a *conjunctive dagesh*. Cf. Van der Merwe, Naudé, & Kroeze 1997, § 8.2, 3.

⁶ The second הודינו is regarded as the beginning of a second (parallel) stich. There is a *rebia* above אלהים that supports this view. This accent and the *atnach* at the end of verse 2b are ignored by the typographical representation in BHS, resulting in emendations to וקרוב and translations such as that of the RSV: 'we call on thy name...' (reading וקרוא).

⁷ The construct form of מדבר is changed to the absolute. It seems that this was the original intention, but that הרים was at some time misunderstood as 'mountains' instead of the infinitive construct *Hi* of רום. This is also the way in which the RSV has understood the text.

⁸ The text-critical apparatus of BHS and, as a consequence, some interpreters, read a third person masculine singular 'he'. There is, however, no textual substantiation for such a change. Cf. for example, Kraus (1966:520); Weiser (1975:521).

congregation ('we') to Yahweh. It consists of only one line of verse with three stichs that are all parallel. In the first two of these, the word for 'thank' (or 'praise') is repeated in a prominent position, providing one parallel element; the suffix second person masculine singular is also repeated; and the title 'God' in the first stich forms a parallel to 'name' in the second. The third stich also begins with a verb, providing a grammatical parallel to the first two. It also contains the second person suffix that occurs in the first two, while the word for 'wonderful deeds' forms a semantic parallel to 'name' in the middle stich. The word *נפלאות* is usually used in conjunction with saving acts performed by Yahweh and refers to his honour in the same way as does his 'name' in the middle stich.

In the second stanza (II), God announces his judgement. The chaos his people experience in nature and society is put into perspective in strophe B: the earth has not toppled over. The reason for this is that God has established its pillars firmly. The second verse line (line number 2; verse 3) has a parallel between the verb forms in the first person imperfect. There is also a parallel between 'time' and 'fairness', since both these words stress the firm control of Yahweh over creation. This forms a chiasmus, but also an external parallel to the third verse line: Yahweh will be the judge since he is the creator. One line (verse line 2) speaks of his control in future, the other (verse line 3) of his control in the past and at present. In verse line two, the prominent placing and repetition of the letters *aleph* and *mem* create alliteration and stress the ability of Yahweh to judge (*א - מ - א - מ - א*). Finally, there is also an antithetic parallel between the two stichs of the third verse line (verse 4ab). The verb and its subject are inverted in the second stich, placing great emphasis on the explicit subject 'I'. This is why the translation of the second stich begins with 'but'. The word *אך* and the two suffixes referring back to it also create a parallel between the two hemistichs.

Strophe C contains the warning of Yahweh to the arrogant and wicked people. The two verse lines of this strophe (verse lines 4 and 5; verses 5 and 6) form a chiastic external parallel. The two hemistichs in the middle form a very close parallel ('Don't raise a horn' versus 'Don't raise your horn so high'). At the same time, the first and last of these four stichs also form a parallel ('boast' is parallel to 'speak arrogantly in the neck'). On top of this, the two verse lines themselves are also structured parallel. Verse line 4 has six elements in parallel between its two hemistichs,⁹ while verse line 5 has four parallel elements.¹⁰ The metaphor of boasting and arrogance represented as the raising of a horn is used twice in strophe C. In this instance, it forms a parallel, but where it is repeated in stanza IV, it forms an antithesis.

Stanza III elaborates on the theme of the judgement of Yahweh. However, the

⁹ The preposition *ל*, a noun in the masculine plural, the negative particle *לֹא*, and a masculine plural second person jussive.

¹⁰ In each there is a jussive in the masculine plural, a preposition, and a noun from the semantic field of arrogance.

speaker is no longer Yahweh; it is someone speaking on his behalf such as a priest or prophet. The two verse lines of strophe D have a very clever parallel. Verse line 6 seemingly expresses the idea that no one on earth can raise the status of a person. To define this in a poetic way, the east and the west are mentioned, and also another indication of direction, presumably the south ('wilderness'). However, east and west are defined in terms of the rising¹¹ and the setting of the sun. These terms form a parallel to the second half of verse line 7 (verse 8) that speaks of God bringing people low and raising other people. In addition to this, the stems נִי and רוּם are repeated,¹² creating rhyme between the beginning and end of these verse lines (6 and 7; verses 7 and 8). Verse lines 6 and 7 therefore also have internal parallels. In the first hemistich of verse line 6, the word for 'from the rising' is parallel to 'from the setting'; while the two hemistichs also form a parallel since the negative particle and the preposition are repeated. In verse line 7 there is an internal parallel in the second hemistich, while sound play is formed with the words שָׁפַט and יִשְׁפִּיל and the endings of אֱלֹהִים and יָרִים . This establishes a chiasmus of sounds, suggesting the inversion of people's status in an acoustic way. The idea of inversion in social status is also enhanced by the antitheses between 'east' and 'west' and between 'brings low' and 'exalts'.¹³

Strophe E continues the theme of Yahweh's judgement. However, his judgement is no longer described merely as inverting the status of people. The focus is on the wicked people of the earth who will have to take the cup of judgement from the hand of Yahweh and empty it to the dregs. The image of the cup is more than a mere metaphor; it assumes the proportions of an allegory in these verses.¹⁴ Verse line nine has a chiastic arrangement of verbs and modifiers. This has the effect that the two verbs, which both have the wicked as its subject, occur in close proximity and together emphasise the suddenness and finality of the judgement of Yahweh.

The final strophe (F) is designated in this stichometric analysis as a new stanza (IV) since there is a shift in focus. It represents a summing up of the poem. Its beginning reminds the reader of the first strophe (envelope figure or *inclusio*). It also speaks of a proclamation and singing in honour of God, but there are climactic features. The God of the audience is now identified as 'the God of Jacob'. He was also identified as 'Yahweh' in verse 9a, but this is the first time that אֱלֹהִים , who was also mentioned in verse 8a, is identified as the God of a particular group of people. The arrogance that was mentioned in strophe C is once more referred to, while the judgement mentioned in strophes B, D, and E features here as the chopping off of the 'horns of the wicked'. There is an internal parallel in the tenth verse line (a first

¹¹ Or 'going out', cf. Psalm 19:6 for the use of the verb with the sun as a subject.

¹² This emphasises the fact that Yahweh alone is the judge. Girard (1994:318) uses the schematic representation X⁻¹-Y-X-Y to portray this antithetic parallel.

¹³ According to Hossfeld (Hossfeld & Zenger 1993:430), this last antithesis is to be regarded as a merism which circumscribes the sovereign power of God.

¹⁴ According to Watson (1986:264), it is a 'conventionalised metaphor' to use the word 'cup' to denote allotted portion or destiny. In this case, however, there is more than one *tertium comparationis*.

person singular imperfect corresponding to a volutative and the repetition of the preposition בְּ . The last verse line (verse line 11) concludes the poem with an antithesis and an internal chiasmic parallel. In the first hemistich, the verb is placed at the end; in the second, it is placed at the beginning. The two verbs are also opposite in meaning ('chop off' versus 'will be lifted up'). This juxtaposition enhances the antithesis. A form of the word for 'horn' therefore occurs in both hemistichs, and the words of the pair *wicked* and *righteous* are thus contrasted, also forming an antithetic parallel.

The stem רָם , to be high or to lift up, appears no fewer than six times in the psalm. It is used to express the arrogance of people who boast (forming an instance of *figura etymologica* in verse 6a) and to refer to the power of God who can bring people low in judgement and elevate others in justice. It must be regarded as the central motif of the psalm. The antitheses and the fourfold use of the word 'horn' greatly contribute to the impact of this technique. The word 'all' is used three times in the psalm. The first time it tells the audience (or reader) that 'all' the inhabitants of the *earth* are in turmoil (verse 4a). It is then used a second time to emphasise that 'all' the wicked of the *earth* will have to drink from the cup of judgement (verse 9e). Finally, it is used to tell of the felling of 'all the horns of the wicked' (verse 11a). The comprehensive disorder in the world will therefore be countered by a comprehensive judgement and a rectification of social order. As was already mentioned, the word קֶרֶן , 'horn', is used four times. It occurs twice in the singular, once in the dual and once in the plural. Interestingly enough, the plural is used in the case of the 'horns of the righteous', but the dual in the case of the 'horns of the wicked' (verse 11).

Negative particles are used to discipline certain human actions and to rectify certain views. The particle לֹא is used in conjunction with two jussives to prohibit the boasting and arrogance of people (verse 5ab). The notion that some or other earthly power is responsible for raising people in status is refuted in verse 7ab with the help of the particle אֵל .

If the repetition of certain words and themes is taken as a guide, strophe A seems to correspond to strophe F (to 'thank' is from the same semantic field as to 'sing'; 'God' and 'your name' correspond to 'the God of Jacob' and 'people tell' correspond to 'I will proclaim for ever'). Strophe B in turn corresponds to strophes D and E. In these, the phrase 'I will judge' corresponds to 'God is the judge' and the words 'the earth and all its inhabitants' correspond to 'all the wicked of the earth'. Strophe C articulates well with strophes E and F. The theme of the 'wicked' is taken up in strophe E, while the raising of 'horns' is again mentioned in strophe F. The theme of 'lifting up' also dominates strophe D, so that there is a close connection between strophes C, D, and F.

From the poetic analysis, it seems that the antithesis between righteous and wicked people and God's intention of subduing the arrogant aims and actions of the wicked by exercising judgement on them, forms the main focus of the psalm. The textual strategy is to use metaphors (a 'horn' as arrogance; a 'cup' as judgement), and

the parallel, chiasmic and antithetic arrangement of elements to highlight the arrogance of the wicked and the restoration of the status of Yahweh's people by a willing and all-powerful creator God.

C SOCIAL-CRITICAL ISSUES

It is obvious that a number of different voices are heard in this psalm.¹⁵ There is a first person *plural* speaker in verse 2 (stanza I). There is also a first person *singular* speaker in verses 3-6 (stanza II), who can be no one other than Yahweh. Then there is another first person singular speaker who cannot be Yahweh, since he speaks *about* Yahweh in the third person. His voice is heard in verses 7-11 (stanzas III and IV).

Verse 11 poses a problem, however. It does not seem right that someone should extol the singular power of Yahweh to judge people by bringing some low and exalting others, and then in the same voice announce that he himself will chop off the horns of the wicked. For that reason, some commentators have opted to change the first person imperfect *pi'el* to a third person masculine singular.¹⁶ The problem is caused by the *waw* copulative that introduces verse 11. Had it not been there, these words could more easily have been understood to be the direct speech of Yahweh again. Yet, it is probably better to interpret this verse line as the direct speech of Yahweh. The human subject speaking in verse 10 quotes these words, introduced by the *waw*, as a reason for his or her praising Yahweh.¹⁷ The passive construction in verse 11b, which forms a parallel to verse 11a, serves as a confirmation to this surmise. It should be seen as a pious way of expressing the idea that *Yahweh* will lift up the horns of the righteous and not some or other human subject¹⁸ (compare this with verses 7 and 8 where the same idea is expressed).

We must assume that the psalm is a document that was designed to have religious and political impact.¹⁹ It was intended for use by a group of people who have a close relationship with their God, identified as 'God',²⁰ 'Yahweh' and 'the God of Jacob'. His name is said to be 'close' to them.²¹ They thank this God and tell

¹⁵ Schneider (1996:139) says: 'Das Eigenartige dieses Psalms liegt darin, daß er *dialogisch* ist'.

¹⁶ So, for instance, Kraus (1966:520). He reads a third person masculine singular, arguing that the first person form was a change brought about by verse 10.

¹⁷ Cf. Van der Merwe, Naudé, & Kroeze 1997, § 40.8.2(iv).

¹⁸ This refutes Eaton's idea that the king is now speaking for God (Eaton 1976:55-56).

¹⁹ A theological text is ideological in the sense that it was designed as a 'persuasive vehicle of communication and social interaction, and thus an instrument of social as well as literary and theological consequence' (Elliott 1993:70).

²⁰ Some consider the references to 'God' instead of 'Yahweh' to be an Elohist revision of the psalm. Cf. Kraus (1966:520).

²¹ For other instances where the expression is used in the Psalms, cf. Ps 34:19 (Yahweh is near those who are of a broken heart), Ps 85:10 (Yahweh's salvation is near those who fear him), and Ps 145:18 (Yahweh is near those who call upon him in truth). These examples show that it is not necessary to suppose that a cultic appearance of Yahweh has immediately preceded this confession by the congregation (so Weiser

of his wonderful deeds in the past. Those actions of Yahweh served to constitute the group of believers. The word used for 'wonderful deeds' often implies 'the saving acts of Yahweh' in the Old Testament. It is used in the Pentateuch for the signs and wonders which Yahweh had performed to convince the Egyptians of his power and authority and to bring about the liberation of his people from slavery.²² In other contexts in the Hebrew Bible, especially in the Psalms, it often refers also to this history.²³ There are, however, contexts in which it might refer to Yahweh's dealings with mankind in general.²⁴ However it may be, it seems that such acts by Yahweh are needed once again, since members of the out-group²⁵ are denying Yahweh's authority and power through their arrogance. The members of this opposing or out-group are referred to in a number of descriptions. There is a reference to 'the earth and all its inhabitants' who 'are in turmoil' (verse 4a).²⁶ The psalm also refers to people who 'boast' and, parallel to this, to 'the wicked' (verse 5). In verse 9e they are described as 'the wicked of the earth' and in verse 11a are simply referred to as 'the wicked'.

It seems that politics and religion cannot be differentiated in this document. If the inhabitants of the earth are in turmoil, there must have been some kind of political or military upheaval.²⁷ People have also been wronged,²⁸ for God will have to act as a judge (verses 3b and 8a). The root cause of the problem is the arrogance of members of the out-group. They 'boast' (verse 5a) and they 'raise' their 'horn' (verse 5b) too 'high' (verse 6a). They also 'speak arrogantly in the neck' (verse 6b). They have assumed power and status that have not been accorded to them by Yahweh and that therefore must be removed by his intervention. When he intervenes, he will empower the members of the in-group, the 'righteous' (verse 11b). Their 'horns' will be 'lifted up', while 'all the horns of the wicked' will be chopped off (verse 11a).

To be able to understand the psalm, it is perhaps necessary to investigate the meaning of the metaphor of horns once more. It is obvious that it forms a key concept or root metaphor. From this psalm, it seems that 'to raise a horn' is the same as 'to boast'. The two expressions are used synonymously in verse 5. According to verse 6, to speak 'arrogantly in the neck' can be described as raising a horn too 'high'.²⁹ If strophe D is called as a witness, it seems that this kind of arrogance consists of assuming a higher status than was accorded to one by the ultimate authority, namely

1955:355).

²² Cf. Ex 3:20; Ex 34:10.

²³ Cf. 1 Chron 16:12; Ps 9:2; 26:7; 40:6; 71:17; 72:18; 96:3; 105:2, 5; 106:22; etc. Gunkel (Gunkel-Begriff 1933 [1985]: 41) regards the word as typical of hymns.

²⁴ For example, Job 42:3 and Ps 131:1.

²⁵ An out-group is a group of persons 'that is perceived by members of an in-group as holding different or competing interests and values from those of the in-group and that is designated by the in-group members as "they", often with negative valuation.' Elliott (1993:132).

²⁶ Cf. Am 8:8; 9:5-6; Ps 46:7.

²⁷ Cf. Ex 15:15; Jos 2:9, 24; 1 Sam 14:16; etc.

²⁸ So also Jeremias (1987:129).

²⁹ Cf. 1 Sam 2:3 where the warning of v. 6b is echoed with the words *הִתְבַּרְוּ עִתִּיק*:

God.³⁰ The judgement in a case like this will involve humiliation of the arrogant. This is described as chopping off the arrogant horn and elevating the horn of those who really do deserve to be honoured ('uplifting' their horns). It seems that the two connotations that are found most often in association with the raising or the lowering of a horn are *power*³¹ and *honour*³² (and, conversely, *shame*).³³ With reference to dominating behaviour of males in the most species of antelope, this is perhaps not so strange.³⁴ As a rule, power equals honour in the animal world. A head and, consequently, a horn held high symbolise dominance, power, and honour.³⁵ The same applied to individuals and groups of people in the Ancient Near East.³⁶ However, if the authority was assumed in a way that would infringe on the honour of Yahweh, it was tantamount to arrogance and arrogance had to be punished.

The social context of this psalm thus seems to be that members of the out-group acted from a position of strength in regard to the in-group. There is some form of oppression. The out-group assumed that their power authorised the assumption of honour. In relation to Yahweh, however, no one had any authority, power, or honour.³⁷ Their actions and words therefore constituted blasphemy and arrogance against Yahweh, but also against his chosen people, Israel. The psalm therefore

³⁰ Cf. Pr 16:18; Is 5:15-16; 13:11; and 23:9. Arrogance can be described as 'an unsubstantiated claim to honour'.

³¹ In 1 Sam 2:10, for instance, it is used parallel to *עו* 'power'. Cf. also Micah 4:13. Keel (1980:76) regards horns as 'ein im AO weit verbreitetes Symbol der Macht'. He refers specifically to Ps 75:5, 6, and 11 and Ps 92:11.

³² In 1 Sam 2:1, for instance, the raising of one's horn is used parallel to the opening of one's mouth against one's enemies, compare with this Ez 29:21. Cf. also Ps 89:18, 25 (used in conjunction with Yahweh's 'name'); Ps 92:11 (used in conjunction with anointing with oil); Ps 112:9 (used together with *כבוד*); Ps 132:17; Ps 148:14; Lam 2:17 (the honour of Israel's enemies). That horns also symbolise honour or glory can be seen from those contexts where rays of light are described as 'horns', such as Habakkuk 3:4 (although it is used parallel to 'power') and Exodus 34:29 (where the verb *קרן* is used to describe the rays of light emanating from Moses' face). According to Anderson (1981:549), 'horn' is a 'well-known symbol of strength and might, pride and dignity'.

³³ In Job 16:15 the process of mourning is described in parallel as thrusting one's horn in the dust, figurative of humiliation. Cf. also Lam 2:3.

³⁴ Chevalier & Gheerbrant (1996:513) says: 'Horns convey a feeling of eminence and loftiness. Their symbolism is that of power, which is, in any case and generally speaking, that possessed by the animals which bear them.'

³⁵ Gunkel (Gunkel-Begriff 1933 [1985]:148) speaks of the psalmist comparing himself 'mit einem Wildtier... der mit erhobenem Horn frohlockend dasteht'.

³⁶ Gunkel (Gunkel-Begriff 1933 [1985]:148) is of the opinion that the metaphor originally was used in royal contexts only. In this regard he draws our attention to the Babylonian crown of horns that symbolised the power of a god. From there it was transposed to the king (he cites the case of Naramsin) and later (in the Old Testament) to a people and finally to individual people. According to him (Gunkel-Begriff 1933 [1985]:148), the feeling of *triumph* is the important element of the metaphor.

³⁷ '...one must renounce one's claim to honor as precedence to gain a privileged relationship to God' (Moxnes 1996:29).

seems to be a declaration of faith in Yahweh's ability and willingness to re-establish³⁸ his authority and honour and, together with that, the honour of his people.³⁹ It serves as a confirmation and strengthening of the belief that their God is the creator of heaven and earth who is able to control the destiny of all people (verse 4). He alone decides about the status and honour of individuals and nations (verse 8a). His decisions in this regard are regulated by the principle that haughtiness will be punished with humiliation and humility will be rewarded with upliftment.⁴⁰ Those who misappropriated their authority will be branded as wicked people and will be humiliated by having to drink the cup of judgement to the dregs.⁴¹ This theme is found often in the Hebrew Bible, especially in the prophetic books.⁴² Yahweh's timing with the judgement is perfect ('at the time I appoint', v. 3a). He will act on exactly the time he has determined.⁴³ It is also stated that his judging (שפט) will be in fairness (במשרים, v. 3b). Similar statements are also found in other contexts in the Hebrew Bible.⁴⁴ Psalm 96:10 speaks of Yahweh's judging (דין) the peoples with fairness (במשרים).⁴⁵ In Isaiah 11:4, it is the meek people who will be *reproved* (יבה) with equity (במשורר). Yahweh's judgement has the purpose of restoring his own honour as well as that of his worshippers.⁴⁶ Like the case of a suzerain with rebel vassal-kings, judgement would entail the setting up of God's throne above the gods and all the nations.⁴⁷

The author makes appeal to a number of shared traditions, values, and norms to persuade his audience. Among these are the concepts of Yahweh as the creator-God, Yahweh as the saviour from oppression, the ideal of humility before God, and

³⁸ Hossfeld (Hossfeld & Zenger 1993:428-429) stresses the fact that verbal perfects are used and describes this as a 'Schilderung des vergangenen Lobes'. In the present situation of affliction, there is no concrete reason to praise God, he says. The past praises are definitely focused upon, but for the believing Israelite, there was always more than enough reason to praise Yahweh, even in the greatest distress. Compare the present tense descriptions (through nominal sentences) in verses 2b and 7-9.

³⁹ Israel's claim to honour is its special relationship with Yahweh. When the nation is seemingly abandoned by their God, this will inevitably lead to shame. Cf. Plevnik (1998:108). See in this regard also the remarks by Mowinkel (1966:69) on Ps 75: 'Es ist seine eigene Schande, wenn seinen Kennern, den Mitgliedern seiner Sippe, seines Bundes, Abbruch getan wird; um ihrer Rettung willen möge er daher eingreifen und die Niederlage in Sieg verwandeln'. He thinks of the historic situation of the psalm as a battle that was won by the enemies of Israel.

⁴⁰ Cf. 1 Sam 2:3, 7-10; Pr 16:18; Is 5:15 and 23:9.

⁴¹ Drinking the cup of judgement is a humiliation in itself. Cf. Ez 23:32; Hab 2:16.

⁴² Cf. Is 51:22-23; Jer 25:15-28; 49:12; 51:39; Ez 23:31-35; Hab 2:16; Ps 11:6; 60:5; 80:6. Cf. also Gunkel-Begrich 1933 [1985]:336.

⁴³ For a less patient attitude in which Yahweh is told that the time (מועד or עתה) has come, cf. Ps 102:14; 119:126. Gunkel (Gunkel-Begrich 1933 [1985]:330-331) notes the similarity between Psalms and the prophetic literature that the time for God to act is near (Ps 85:10; Is 5:19; Hab 2:3) or has already come.

⁴⁴ Cf. Ps 9:9; 96:13; 98:9; 99:3-4.

⁴⁵ The form is usually regarded as a plural of amplification (Anderson 1981:548).

⁴⁶ Cf. in this regard my article on the 'Enthronement Psalms'. (Botha 1998). The setting seems to fit the post-exilic situation. So also Hossfeld & Zenger (1993:429).

⁴⁷ Ps 7:7-9; 9:5; 8-9. Cf. also Jer 1:15; 43:10; 49:38; Dan 7:9-10.

the tradition of Yahweh as the judge of the world. Yahweh is depicted as creator of the earth who is consequently also in firm control of all its inhabitants. The motif of Yahweh having established the earth on pillars is also found in 1 Samuel 2:8.⁴⁸ There are differences between the two contexts: different lexemes⁴⁹ are used and in the Samuel context, it is the earth that has been established, not its pillars. It seems, therefore, that the intertextual relationship is a similarity of ideas rather than a literary dependence.⁵⁰ Yahweh's power is also reflected in verse 7, where the statement is made that there is no power between the east and the west that is comparable with that of Yahweh.⁵¹

The theme of Yahweh's 'wonderful deeds' of saving his people has been discussed above. These deeds of Yahweh are 'told' or 'related' according to verse 2. In Judges 6:13, exactly the same form of ספר is used to describe the retelling of Yahweh's wonderful deeds by previous generations.⁵² To 'praise' or 'thank' Yahweh⁵³ and to 'sing' or 'proclaim'⁵⁴ his name are also well-known motifs in the book of Psalms. What is perhaps less well-known, is the fact that these words together form a complex of thoughts closely related to the covenant.⁵⁵ When Yahweh complies with the obligations of the covenant by looking after his people, they have the obligation to proclaim his honour in public.⁵⁶ The verbs and nouns used in verses 2 and 10 (the sections of the psalm dealing with the praise of the congregation and the first person speaker respectively) reflect this obligation exactly. Verse 2 refers to Yahweh's intervention in the past, whereas verse 10 focuses on the future praise of Yahweh because of the expected intervention in future. In this regard, the perfect forms in verse 2 should be compared with the imperfect forms in verse 10. Note also the temporal qualification 'for ever' in verse 10. Subtle pressure is applied on Yahweh to intervene in a way that is concordant with the terms and conditions of the covenant. If verse 11 is indeed a quotation from an oracular context (as it was

⁴⁸ Cf. also Job 9:5; 26:11; 34:13; 38:4; Ps 24:1-2; 89:12; 104:5; Pr 3:19; Is 45:18; 48:13; Jer 31:37; etc.

⁴⁹ In the Samuel text שיה and מצוק are used instead of חסן and עמוד.

⁵⁰ According to Hossfeld (Hossfeld & Zenger 1993:427), 'Man hat den Eindruck, daß das Dankgebet der Hanna ein theologisch weiterentwickeltes, jüngeres Stadium asafitischer Tradition repräsentiert.'

⁵¹ Cf. in this regard texts like Ps 19:7 and 65:9.

⁵² Cf. also 1 Chron 16:24; Ps 9:2; 26:7; 78:4; and 96:3. It therefore seems improbable that the 'wonderful deeds' are to be taken as the subject of the verb: 'deine Wunder erzählen (es)'. Thus Schneider (1996:138).

⁵³ Cf. Ps 7:18; 9:2; 18:50; 30:5; 30:13; etc.

⁵⁴ In Psalm 9:12, the verbs זמר and נגד are used as a word-pair in a context similar to Ps 75:10. Cf. also Ps 19:2; 22:32; 30:2; 40:2; 71:2, etc.

⁵⁵ Cf. in this regard the article by Olyan (1996:204-208). He notes that 'Expressions of honor in covenant settings abound. Yhwh's worshipers honor him through appropriate sacrifices and other cultic rites...'. The intervention of Yahweh to save worshippers and the obligation they have to honour or to love him, is a well-known theme in the Old Testament. Cf. in this regard Ps 50:23; 79:9; 91:14-15; Jer 20:13. The intervention of Yahweh to save his worshippers also brings honour to them. Cf. Zech 12:7; Ps 91:15; Mal 3:16-20 (Masoretic text). Cf. also Plevnik (1998:109).

⁵⁶ Cf. my article on honour and shame as key concepts in Malachi (Botha 2001:393-394).

interpreted in the poetic analysis above), that is, a phrase reflecting the direct words of Yahweh, then the expectation of Yahweh's intervention is built on this promise.

From this investigation, it has become clear that the social values of honour and its opposite, shame, form the frame of reference without which the psalm can hardly be interpreted. Words, phrases, and images relating to honour or shame are the following:

Positive connotation (associated with honour)	Negative connotation (associated with shame)
We <i>thank you</i> (v. 2a)	The earth and all its inhabitants are in <i>turmoil</i> (v. 4a)
We give <i>thanks</i> (v. 2b)	Those who <i>boast</i> (v. 5a)
Your <i>name</i> is <i>close</i> (v. 2c)	Don't <i>boast!</i> (v. 5a)
They <i>relate</i> your <i>wonderful deeds</i> (v. 2c)	The <i>wicked</i> (v. 5b)
At the time I appoint, I will <i>judge</i> with <i>fairness</i> (v. 3)	Don't <i>raise a horn!</i> (v. 5b)
I have <i>firmly established</i> its pillars (v. 4b)	Don't <i>raise your horn</i> so <i>high</i> (v. 6a)
<i>Uplifting</i> (v. 7b)	Don't <i>speak arrogantly in the neck</i> (v. 6b)
God is the <i>judge</i> (v. 8a)	Who brings <i>low</i> (v. 8b)
Who <i>exalts</i> (v. 8b)	A <i>cup</i> is in the hand of Yahweh, the wine foams up and he pours from it (v. 9a-c)
I will <i>proclaim</i> for ever (v. 10a)	They will <i>drain it out</i> (v. 9d)
I will <i>sing</i> to the <i>God of Jacob</i> (v. 10b)	They will <i>drink</i> , all the <i>wicked</i> (v. 9e)
The <i>horns</i> of the <i>righteous</i> will be <i>lifted up</i> (v. 11b)	All the <i>horns</i> of the <i>wicked</i> I will <i>chop off</i> (v. 11a)

From this comparison, the differences between the in-group ('we'/'I') and the out-group ('they'/'the wicked') and the differences between Yahweh and the out-group are very clear. The in-group is focused on honouring Yahweh and recognising his prerogative to promote and demote whoever he wishes. Yahweh himself is focused on re-establishing his authority by judging the wicked and arrogant people and the world that is in turmoil. The out-group do not recognise the honour of either Yahweh or his people. Therefore, they believe that they themselves can assume a position of honour and 'raise' their own 'horn'. Therefore, also, they speak arrogantly. The social position of the in-group is therefore a disadvantaged one, perhaps even a powerless one. However, Yahweh is ready to turn the tables so that the out-group will be dishonoured in judgement and the righteous people's honour will be restored.⁵⁷ This

⁵⁷ Hossfeld (Hossfeld & Zenger 1993:428) regards the theme of the coming judgement to be a characteristic

belief is stressed through antitheses, repetition, and emphatic placement of certain words.⁵⁸

D COMPARISON OF RESULTS WITH OTHER APPROACHES

Gunkel (Gunkel-Begrich 1933 [1985]:32) has described the psalm as a liturgy with hymn-like elements. A liturgy, according to him, consists of different *Gattungen* preserved as independent units in a greater unity.⁵⁹ He regarded verses 2 and 5-11 as hymn-like parts of the psalm (Gunkel-Begrich 1933 [1985]:32; cf. Kraus 1966:521),⁶⁰ but described verses 3-4⁶¹ and 7-9⁶² also as prophetic liturgies and, more specifically, eschatological pronouncements (Gunkel-Begrich 1933 [1985]:346). Van der Ploeg (1973:453) objects that the psalm is too short for a liturgy and thinks rather of the psalm being used in the synagogue or temple after a section was read from the history of Israel. In such a setting it could have been used with a view to the expected judgement on a group of sinners (enemies);⁶³ on the other hand it may have focused on the 'final' judgement in general (Van der Ploeg 1973:454).⁶⁴ Treves (1988:64) regards it as 'an inaugural proclamation of a ruler or dictator who promises to govern with equity', but at the same time it is 'a thanksgiving for some joyful occurrence' (Treves 1988:64).

Kraus (1966:521) rightly asks what the meaning of such a strange composition from different genres⁶⁵ might be. He notes that, in the search for a 'Sitz im Leben', a historic situation was favoured at first (Kraus (1966:521). Then an eschatological understanding came to be preferred (Duhm, Stade, and Gunkel), and, finally, Mowinckel attempted a cultic explanation from the thought-world of the 'feast of enthronement of Yahweh' (Kraus 1966:521; cf. Mowinckel 1966:31⁶⁶). Weiser⁶⁷ also

of the work of the Asaphites.

⁵⁸ Note the repeated use of יָד in verses 3a, 7a, 8a, and 9a; the (emphatic) first person singular pronoun in verses 3b and 4b; and also the use of אָנֹכִי in verse 9d and the use of אָנֹכִי in verses 9e and 11a.

⁵⁹ A 'höheren Einheit', Gunkel-Begrich 1933 [1985]:404.

⁶⁰ Especially the first person imperfect forms, the verbs and temporal qualification in verse 10 is very typical of the hymn form. So, for example, Gunkel (Gunkel-Begrich 1933 [1985]:38). Kraus (1966:521) identifies a collective song of thanksgiving in verse 2 which is continued in verse 10-11, although these last two verses were sung by an individual.

⁶¹ Described by Kraus (1966:521) as an 'Orakel' inserted in the collective song of thanksgiving.

⁶² Kraus (1966:521) regards 5-8 to be a 'Mahnwort' against the evildoers and verse 9 to be a visionary description of the judgement of God.

⁶³ An idea that is also found in Mowinckel (1966:47).

⁶⁴ Kraus rightly remarks that these possibilities are not alternatives. Yahweh's judgement is imminent, but it is and remains also something that is final (Kraus 1966:522).

⁶⁵ According to him, a song of thanksgiving, an oracle, a warning, and again a song of thanksgiving. Hossfeld & Zenger (1993:426) detect elements of a hymn of thanksgiving (verses 1-2); a lament of an individual (verses 5-6; 9 and 10); and two oracles (verse 3-4 and 11).

⁶⁶ In his *Psalmstudien III* (Mowinckel 1966:49) he regarded Ps 75 as a possible case where the ideas of the enthronement of Yahweh were used in another cultic setting: another 'casual' feast, used against 'ganz

thinks of a cultic liturgy. Kraus himself (Kraus 1966:521) argues for an approach in which the plight of the religious community is used as the point of departure. Their predicament is that they experience a situation of complete disruption and disorder in which the wicked triumph.⁶⁸ The wicked ignore the pending judgement by God and exalt themselves in their power, destroying the order of society (Kraus 1966:521). According to him, verses 3-4 are the oracular answer of Yahweh to a supposed, earlier lament by the community. This answer is surrounded by the thanksgiving of the community (verses 2 and 10-11; Kraus 1966:522). The community is already sure that Yahweh will step in and judge the enemies of the righteous. A priest or cultic prophet has pronounced a warning (verses 5-8) and the religious community already perceives the judge of the world in action (verse 9). But it is, according to Kraus (1966:522), almost impossible to determine the time of origin of the psalm.

The problem with such an interpretation is that it places too much emphasis on the rituals of the cult. The effect that this psalm as a *literary composition* had on a community of believers, and the communicative intent of the author or editor of this composition, are disregarded.⁶⁹ From such an approach, it would seem that symbolic actions were all that mattered in the cult, more than understanding or emotions.⁷⁰ The real focus of the psalm, namely the restoration of the honour of Yahweh, and the consequent restoration of the honour of his worshippers, is overlooked to such an extent that it is almost ignored.⁷¹ By emphasising the different genres that are supposedly represented in the psalm, its unity of focus and its communicative intent are fragmented.⁷² In the light of a growing awareness of the importance of the social values of honour and shame in the ancient world, a re-evaluation of the psalms as ideological rather than cultic⁷³ documents is called for.⁷⁴

bestimmte geschichtliche Feinde’.

⁶⁷ Weiser (1955:355) calls it ‘das Stück einer Kultliturgie’.

⁶⁸ Compare this with the contrasting finding of Briggs (1925:161) that the psalm ‘is written in a calm tone of confidence in God and praise to Him for His wonders. It implies a peaceful condition of the community, probably in Babylonia prior to Nehemiah.

⁶⁹ This is also true of the attempt of Schneider (1996:139-141) to explain the different voices in the psalm as elements of a dynamic prayer in which a priest or prophet made oracular announcements. This is a step in the right direction, but it still clings to the idea that a liturgy was the only way in which God could communicate with humans. As the image of the cup of judgement functioned only as a symbol, so the other elements of this prayer probably had symbolic significance only. Cf. the critique of Weiser (1955:357) in this regard on the interpretation by Hans Schmidt.

⁷⁰ Cf. the remark by Hossfeld (Hossfeld & Zenger 1993: 427) that ‘Die spezifische Gestalt dieses Psalms ... läßt weniger auf seine institutionelle, liturgische Verankerung schließen als auf ein individuelles literarisches Gebet eines dem Kult und der Prophetie verbundenen Theologen’.

⁷¹ Kraus (1966:522) does refer to the wicked ‘die stolz “das Horn erheben”’ and speaks about the ‘maßloser Hybris gegen den Gott in der Höhe’, but still regards the horn as a symbol of ‘Kraft’ or ‘Macht’. Hossfeld (Hossfeld & Zenger 1993:427) also refers to the horn as a symbol of power (‘Macht’).

⁷² As Leupold (1977:548) puts it, the psalm ‘is then faulted because it will not readily fall into the pattern they (the interpreters) have made for it’.

⁷³ Despite his objective of finding a ‘Sitz im Leben’ in the cult for each form, Gunkel cannot be regarded as

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an exponent of the cultic school of interpretation. According to Becker (1975:18-19), he thought of most psalms as being linked only secondary to the cult, 'im Sinn des Gesangbuchs der nachexilischen Tempelgemeinde'.

⁷⁴ Hossfeld & Zenger (1993:428) have made definite progress in this regard. Hossfeld refers to the self-understanding of this group of believers: they regard themselves to be part of the group of righteous and poor people, and they are heirs to the tradition of judgement-prophets.

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