



Reformed Theology in Africa Series

Volume 12

The background of the cover is a photograph of two hands clasped together in prayer. The hands are positioned in the center-left of the frame, with fingers interlaced. The lighting is warm, suggesting a sunset or sunrise, with a gradient from yellow to orange to green. The sky in the background is filled with soft, glowing light and some wispy clouds.

**Biblical
Theology
of prayer
in the
Old Testament**

Edited by

**Albert J Coetsee &
Francois P Viljoen**

Reformed Theology in Africa Series
Volume 12

Biblical Theology of Prayer in the Old Testament



Published by AOSIS Books, an imprint of AOSIS Scholarly Books, a division of AOSIS.

AOSIS Publishing

15 Oxford Street, Durbanville, 7550, Cape Town, South Africa
Postnet Suite 110, Private Bag X19, Durbanville, 7551, Cape Town, South Africa
Tel: +27 21 975 2602
Website: <https://www.aosis.co.za>

Copyright © Albert J Coetsee & Francois P Viljoen (eds.). Licensee: AOSIS (Pty) Ltd
The moral right of the editors has been asserted.

Cover image: This cover design was created by Natascha Olivier/Coco Design with the use of a photograph by NASA (ref. no. -h15dX2ObAs), obtained from Unsplash.com, titled '?', available from <https://unsplash.com/photos/-h15dX2ObAs>, copyright-free under the Unsplash licensing terms, and a photograph by jcomp (ref. no. 5017980) obtained from Freepik, titled 'Free photo spirituality and religion, hands folded in prayer on a holy bible in church concept for faith', available from https://www.freepik.com/free-photo/spirituality-religion-hands-folded-prayer-holy-bible-church-concept-faith_5017980.htm#query=christian%20religion&position=0&from_view=keyword&track=ais, copyright-free under the Freepik licensing terms.

Published in 2023

Impression: 1

ISBN: 978-1-77995-272-1 (print)

ISBN: 978-1-77995-273-8 (epub)

ISBN: 978-1-77995-274-5 (pdf) 

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2023.BK417>

How to cite this work: Coetsee, AJ & Viljoen, FP (eds.), 2023, *Biblical Theology of prayer in the Old Testament*, in Reformed Theology in Africa Series, vol. 12, AOSIS Books, Cape Town.

Reformed Theology in Africa Series

ISSN: 2706-6665

Series Editor: JM Vorster

Printed and bound in South Africa.

Listed in OAPEN (<http://www.oapen.org>), DOAB (<http://www.doabooks.org/>) and indexed by Google Scholar. Some rights reserved.

This is an open-access publication. Except where otherwise noted, this work is distributed under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). A copy of which is available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>. Enquiries outside the terms of the Creative Commons license should be sent to the AOSIS Rights Department at the above address or to publishing@aosis.co.za.



The publisher accepts no responsibility for any statement made or opinion expressed in this publication. Consequently, the publishers and copyright holder will not be liable for any loss or damage sustained by any reader as a result of their action upon any statement or opinion in this work. Links by third-party websites are provided by AOSIS in good faith and for information only. AOSIS disclaims any responsibility for the materials contained in any third-party website referenced in this work.

Every effort has been made to protect the interest of copyright holders. Should any infringement have occurred inadvertently, the publisher apologises and undertakes to amend the omission in the event of a reprint.

Reformed Theology in Africa Series
Volume 12

Biblical Theology of Prayer in the Old Testament

EDITORS

Albert J Coetsee
Francois P Viljoen



Theological and Religious Studies editorial board at AOSIS

Chief Commissioning Editor: Scholarly Books

Andries G van Aarde, MA, DD, PhD, D Litt, South Africa

Board members

Chen Yuehua, Professor of the School of Philosophy, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, China

Christian Danz, Professor of the Institute for Systematic Theology and Religious Studies, Evangelical Theological Faculty, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria.

Corneliu C Simut, Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology, Faculty of Theology, Department of Theology, Music and Social-Humanistic Sciences, Emanuel University of Oradea, Romania; Supervisor of doctorates in Theology, Interdisciplinary Doctoral School, Aurel Vlaicu State University of Arad, Romania; Associate Research Fellow in Dogmatic Theology, Faculty of Theology, Department of Dogmatics and Christian Ethics, University of Pretoria, South Africa.

David D Grafton, Professor of Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations, Duncan Black Macdonald Center for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, Hartford International University for Religion and Peace, United States of America.

David Sim, Professor of New Testament Studies, Department Biblical and Early Christian Studies, Australian Catholic University, Australia.

Evangelia G Dafni, Professor of School of Pastoral and Social Theology, Department of Pastoral and Social Theology and Department of the Bible and Patristic Literature, Faculty of Theology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece.

Fundiswa A Kobo, Professor of Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology, University of South Africa, South Africa.

Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole, Professor of Hebrew and Bible Translation, Department of Hebrew, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Free State, South Africa.

Jeanne Hoeft, Dean of Students and Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology and Pastoral Care, Saint Paul School of Theology, United States of America.

Lisanne D'Andrea-Winslow, Professor of Department of Biology and Biochemistry and Department of Biblical and Theological Studies, University of Northwestern-St Paul, Minnesota, United States of America.

Llewellyn Howes, Professor of Department of Greek and Latin Studies, University of Johannesburg, South Africa.

Marcel Sarot, Emeritus Professor of Fundamental Theology, Tilburg School of Catholic Theology: Religion and Practice, Tilburg University, the Netherlands.

Nancy Howell, Professor of Department of Philosophy of Religion, Faculty of Theology and Religion, Saint Paul School of Theology, Kansas City, United States of America.

Piotr Roszak, Professor of Department of Christian Philosophy, Faculty of Theology, Nicolaus Copernicus University, Poland.

Sigríður Guðmarsdóttir, Professor of Department of Theology and Religion, School of Humanities, University of Iceland, Reykjavík, Iceland; Centre for Mission and Global Studies, Faculty of Theology, Diakonia and Leadership Studies, VID Specialized University, Norway.

Wang Xiaochao, Dean of the Institute of Christianity and Cross-Cultural Studies, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, China.

Warren Carter, LaDonna Kramer Meinders Professor of New Testament, Phillips Theological Seminary, Oklahoma, United States of America.

William RG Loader, Emeritus Professor of New Testament, Murdoch University, Western Australia.

Peer-review declaration

The publisher (AOSIS) endorses the South African 'National Scholarly Book Publishers Forum Best Practice for Peer-Review of Scholarly Books'. The book proposal form was evaluated by our Theological and Religious Studies editorial board. The manuscript underwent an evaluation to compare the level of originality with other published works and was subjected to rigorous two-step peer-review before publication by two technical expert reviewers who did not include the volume editor and were independent of the volume editor, with the identities of the reviewers not revealed to the editor(s) or author(s). The reviewers were independent of the publisher, editor(s) and author(s). The publisher shared feedback on the similarity report and the reviewers' inputs with the manuscript's editor(s) or author(s) to improve the manuscript. Where the reviewers recommended revision and improvements, the editor(s) or author(s) responded adequately to such recommendations. The reviewers commented positively on the scholarly merits of the manuscript and recommended that the book be published.

Research justification

Prayer is a major topic within Christian theology. The biblical text has various references to various recorded and reported prayers. In fact, references to prayer are found within the rich diversity of the various books, corpora and genres of Scripture.

As can be expected, much has been written about prayer in the biblical text. However, a comprehensive Biblical Theology dealing with the concept of prayer in Scripture has not been published before. The current volume intends to fill this gap, assuming that such an approach can provide a valuable contribution to the theological discourse on prayer and related concepts.

The current volume aims to investigate prayer and its related elements – including worship, praise, thanksgiving, adoration, petition, intercession, lament and confession – in the Old Testament on a book-by-book or corpus-by-corpus basis. A subsequent volume investigates prayer in the New Testament in a similar fashion. It concludes with a chapter that provides Biblical-Theological perspectives on prayer in Scripture as a whole based on the chapters' findings in these volumes.

The investigation follows a Biblical-Theological approach, reading the Old Testament on a book-by-book basis in its final form to uncover the Old Testament's overarching theology of prayer, understanding the parts in relation to the whole. By doing this, the discrete nuances of the prayer of the different Old Testament books and corpora can be uncovered, letting the books and corpora speak for themselves. In addition, the advantage of this approach is that it provides findings that can benefit the modern Christian community and contributes to the practice of Reformed Theology in Africa.

The various chapters of this volume are written by biblical scholars who are experts in their fields. As such, this volume represents scholarly discourse for scholars. The chapters of the volume follow the order of Old Testament books according to the Hebrew canon, with some of the biblical books investigated together as literary units. Apart from three chapters on the concept of prayer in the Psalms and one chapter covering prayer in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, one chapter each is devoted to prayer in the Pentateuch, the Former Prophets, the Major Prophets, Minor Prophets, Job, Lamentations, Daniel and Chronicles.

All chapters are original investigations with original results and were cleared of possible plagiarism by using iThenticate.

Albert J Coetsee, Unit for Reformational Theology and the Development of the South African Society, Faculty of Theology, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa.

Francois P Viljoen, Unit for Reformational Theology and the Development of the South African Society, Faculty of Theology, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa.

Contents

Abbreviations and acronyms and tables appearing in the text and notes	xiii
List of abbreviations and acronyms	xiii
List of Tables	xiv
Notes on contributors	xv
Introduction	1
<i>Albert J Coetsee & Francois P Viljoen</i>	
Chapter 1: Prayer in the Pentateuch	7
<i>Matthew Haynes</i>	
Introduction	7
The shape of prayer in the Pentateuch	8
The storyline of the Pentateuch	9
Prayer as conversation	9
Prayer as relational exchange	10
Prayer embodies covenant ideals	11
Conclusions on the general shape of prayer in the Pentateuch	12
Intercession in the Pentateuch	12
Exodus 32:11-14, 33:15-16	12
Numbers 14:13-20	18
Deuteronomy 3:24-28	20
Conclusion	23
Chapter 2: Prayer in the Former Prophets	25
<i>David G Firth</i>	
Introduction	25
Hannah's prayer: 1 Samuel 2:1-10	27
David's response to the dynastic promise - 2 Samuel 7:18-29	32
Solomon's prayer - 1 Kings 8:22-53	37
Conclusion	41

Chapter 3: Prayer in the Major Prophets	43
<i>Jaap Dekker</i>	
Introduction	43
Prayer in the book of Isaiah	44
Prayer in the book of Jeremiah	47
Selected prayers from Isaiah	49
Isaiah 38:10–20	49
Isaiah 51:9–11	51
Isaiah 63:7–64:11	52
Selected prayers from Jeremiah	54
Jeremiah 14:7–9, 19–22	54
Jeremiah 20:7–18	56
Jeremiah 32:17–25	57
Conclusion	58
Chapter 4: Prayer in the Minor Prophets (The Book of the Twelve)	63
<i>Kathleen M Rochester</i>	
Introduction	63
Hosea	65
Joel	66
Amos	66
Micah	67
Zephaniah	68
Zechariah	68
Malachi	69
Jonah	69
Chapter 1	70
Chapter 2	71
Chapter 3	73
Chapter 4	74
Habakkuk	78
Chapter 1	79
Chapter 2	81
Chapter 3	83
Conclusion	85

Chapter 5: Prayer in the Psalms: Praise and worship	87
<i>Fanie Snyman</i>	
Introduction	87
Problem statement and methodological considerations	88
The vocabulary of praise and worship in the Psalter	89
<i>hll</i> [הלל]	89
<i>ydh</i> [ידה]	90
<i>brk</i> [ברך]	90
הללו יה in five movements	90
Praise and worship as a movement from the human to the divine	90
Praise and worship as a movement from lament to praise	93
Praise and worship as a movement from the private to the public and beyond	94
Praise and worship as a movement from the then (past) to the now (present)	96
Praise and worship as a movement from death to life	97
Conclusion	98
Chapter 6: Prayer in the Psalms: Petition, intercession and lament	101
<i>Lekgetho H Moretsi</i>	
Introduction	101
Petition	102
Examples of psalms of petition	104
Psalm 13	105
Intercession	106
Examples of intercessory prayers	107
Lament	107
An example of a psalm of lament	109
Practical reasons from psalms of lament	110
The use of violence in laments	110
Practical considerations	111
Conclusion	112
Chapter 7: Prayers in the Psalms: Prayers of penitence	113
<i>Herrie van Rooy</i>	
Introduction	113
Some historical perspectives	114
Confessions and individual laments	115

Terminology	118
Typical elements of prayers of confession	120
Analysis of exemplary penitential psalms: Psalms 38 and 51	122
Psalm 38	123
Psalm 51 (Adapted; NRSV)	125
Unique perspectives and theological contribution	126
Conclusion	127
Chapter 8: Prayer in Job	129
<i>Edward Ho</i>	
Introduction	129
The prologue	130
Job's opening outburst	131
The speeches of the friends in the first cycle of dialogue	132
The speeches of Job in the first cycle of dialogue	133
The speeches of the friends in the second and third cycles of dialogue	136
The speeches of Job in the second and third cycles of dialogue	137
The wisdom poem and Job's testimony	139
The Elihu speeches	140
The divine speeches and Job's responses	141
The final divine verdict and the epilogue	143
Conclusion	145
Chapter 9: Prayer in Lamentations	147
<i>Gideon R Kotzé</i>	
Introduction	147
Interpretive comments on selected prayer passages of Lamentations	148
Features of the poems of Lamentations that influence the wordings of the prayer passages and the perspectives they present	155
Conclusion	156
Chapter 10: Prayer in Daniel	159
<i>Marius Nel</i>	
Introduction	159
Cultic motifs of the book of Daniel	160
Prayer as an element in the cultic motif of the book of Daniel	162
Redefining the cult	163

Dissonance and function of the prayer of penitence in Daniel 9	164
Ascription, confession and petition in Daniel 9	166
Prayer as worship	169
Prayer portrays character	171
Conclusion	172
Chapter 11: Prayer in Ezra and Nehemiah	175
<i>Sebastian J Floor</i>	
Introduction	175
Section 1: Localising Ezra and Nehemiah in the context of history	176
Section 2: The contents of the prayers in Ezra and Nehemiah	179
Overview of prayer in Ezra and Nehemiah	179
An analysis of the short prayers	180
An analysis of the long prayers	181
Section 3: Ezra and Nehemiah's prayers in the history of revelation	185
Intertextual comparisons	186
What is unique about the Ezra and Nehemiah prayers	188
Old Testament Biblical-Theological perspective	189
New Testament Biblical-Theological perspective	190
Summary	192
Conclusion	193
Chapter 12: Prayer in Chronicles	195
<i>Louis C Jonker</i>	
Introduction	195
Prayers in Chronicles	197
An overview of the prayers	197
Observations	198
David's prayer of praise (1 Chr 29:10b-20)	199
Jehoshaphat's prayer for deliverance (2 Chr 20:6-12)	203
Hezekiah's prayer of penitence (2 Chr 30:18b-19)	205
Rhetorical functions of prayers in Chronicles	207
Conclusion	212
References	215
Index	235

Abbreviations and acronyms and tables appearing in the text and notes

List of abbreviations and acronyms

1QIsa ^a	Isaiah Scroll/Great Isaiah Scroll
4QLam	Qumran manuscript
ACTEA	Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa
ASSAf	South African Academy for Science and Arts
BA	Bachelor of Arts degree; bachelor's degree
BCE	before common era
BHRG	Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar
CAR	Central African Republic
CHE	Christian Higher Education
DRC	Dutch Reformed Church
DRCs	Dutch Reformed Churches
ESV	English Standard Version
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
HoD	head of department
Hons	Honours degree
ISTEL	Instituto Superior de Teologia Evangelica no Lubango
LGBTIQ+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and others
LXX	Septuagint
MA	Master of Arts degree; master's degree
Mt	Mount (n.)
MT	Masoretic Text
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NET	New English Translation [Bible]
NG	Nederduitse Gereformeerde [Dutch Reformed]
NIV	New International Version
NRF	National Research Foundation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
NWU	North-West University
OT	Old Testament

PhD	Doctor of Philosophy degree; doctoral degree
PU	Potchefstroom University
RSA	Republic of South Africa
ThD	Doctor of Theology degree
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
UFS	University of the Free State
UK	United Kingdom
UP	University of Pretoria
USA	United States of America

List of tables

Table 12.1:	The author's adaption of the count of Beentjes, but with own expansions.	200
Table 12.2:	Identification of the rhetorical and theological functions of all the other prayers in Chronicles.	208

Notes on contributors

Albert J Coetsee

Unit for Reformational Theology and the Development of the South African Society,
Faculty of Theology, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa
Email: albert.coetsee@nwu.ac.za
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5549-2474>

Albert J Coetsee is an associate professor in the Old Testament at the North-West University (NWU), Republic of South Africa (RSA). He completed his PhD in 2013 at the same institution on the theme of God's speech in the book of Hebrews and is the author of 20 articles and book chapters and the co-editor of two scholarly books. His research interests include the book of Deuteronomy, the book of Hebrews, the use of the book of Deuteronomy in Hebrews and hermeneutics.

David G Firth^{a,b}

^aTrinity College,
Bristol, United Kingdom
^bDepartment of Old and New Testament Studies,
Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of the Free State,
Bloemfontein, South Africa
Email: david.firth@trinitycollegebristol.ac.uk
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0347-4490>

David G Firth spent seven years in Zimbabwe and South Africa working with the Australian Baptist Missionary Society, training pastors and other Christian workers there. While in South Africa, he also completed his PhD (on responses to violence in the Psalms) through the University of Pretoria (UP), later published as *Surrendering Retribution in the Psalms* (Paternoster, 2005). Returning to his native Australia, he spent time in pastoral ministry and lectured part-time on the Old Testament at the Wesley Institute in Sydney, Australia. Relocating to the United Kingdom (UK), Firth was initially an Old Testament tutor at Cliff College and, while writing for this book, at Trinity College in Bristol, UK. Apart from editing several volumes on the Old Testament, he has published commentaries on Joshua (Lexham Press, 2021), Samuel (Apollos, 2009), Esther (InterVarsity Press [IVP], 2010) and Habakkuk (Crossway, 2016), as well as a study of foreigners in the Former Prophets (*Including the Stranger*, IVP, 2019). He is the editor of the *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary*, the *Baker Handbook to the Old Testament* and co-editor of the 'Baker Commentary Series on the Historical Books'.

Edward Ho^{a,b}

^aBiblical Studies, Chinese Online School of Theology,
Toronto, Canada

^bCarey Theological College,
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Email: eho@carey-edu.ca

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9194-3773>

Edward Ho received his PhD in 2012, with his dissertation entitled 'A Quest for Coherence: A Study of Internal Quotations in the book of Job', from the McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, under the supervision of Dr Mark J Boda (primary) and Dr Paul S Evans (secondary). Ho's research includes authoring two Chinese commentaries on Numbers and the post-exilic prophets Haggai and Malachi. He has also published several peer-reviewed journal articles, essays and book reviews focusing on the book of Job. Ho is a frequent presenter at academic conferences, such as the Society of Biblical Literature, European Association of Biblical Studies and Canadian Society of Biblical Studies annual meetings. He has taught full-time for four years at the Chinese Online School of Theology (Toronto) and part-time at Tyndale Seminary (Toronto) for eleven years. While writing this book, he served as the senior pastor of Markham Chinese Baptist Church and as an adjunct professor at Carey Theological College in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

Francois P Viljoen

Unit for Reformational Theology and the Development of the South African Society,
Faculty of Theology, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa

Email: viljoen.francois@nwu.ac.za

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8251-4539>

Francois P Viljoen is a professor of the New Testament in the Theological School at NWU in Potchefstroom, RSA. He holds a ThD from the former Potchefstroom University (PU) for Christian Higher Education (CHE), now known as NWU (RSA), and a PhD from the Radboud University Nijmegen in the Netherlands. His research focuses on the synoptic Gospels, hermeneutics, and narrative criticism, with most of his publications in Matthean studies, with Viljoen as the author of more than 80 scholarly articles in accredited journals and several chapters in scholarly books. His monographs include *The Torah in Matthew* (LIT Verlag Münster, 2018), *Matthew's Portraits of Jesus* and *Studies in Matthew*. He is the co-editor of two volumes in the 'Reformed Theology in Africa Series' titled *Biblical Theology of Life in the Old Testament* and *Biblical Theology of Life in the New Testament* (AOSIS Books, 2021). Viljoen is recognised as an established C-rated researcher by the National Research Foundation (NRF) of South Africa.

Gideon R Kotzé

Research Focus Area Ancient Texts: Text, Context, and Reception,
Faculty of Theology, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa
Email: kotze.gideon@nwu.ac.za
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2488-4993>

Gideon R Kotzé is a research professor at the Faculty of Theology, NWU, RSA, in the Research Focus Area Ancient Texts: Text, Context, Reception. His main research fields are textual criticism of early Jewish literature, including the writings of the Hebrew Bible, comparative studies and the Septuagint.

Herrie van Rooy

Research Focus Area Ancient Texts: Text, Context, and Reception,
Faculty of Theology, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa
Email: herrie.vanrooy@nwu.ac.za
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5032-2356>

Herrie van Rooy is an emeritus professor in the Old Testament and Semitics at NWU in Potchefstroom, RSA. He received his PhD in 1977 and taught Semitics and Old Testament at his alma mater during 1980–2014. He served on the executive committees of the Old Testament Society (1992–2004; chair 1998–2004) and the South African Society of Near Eastern Studies (1988–2000; chair 1996–2000). Van Rooy has served on the Old Testament Studies editorial board since 1999. He was also a member of the steering committee and the Old Testament editorial committee of a new Afrikaans translation of the Bible, published by The Bible Society of South Africa in 2020. His publications include *Studies on the Syriac Apocryphal Psalms* (Oxford University Press Academic, 1999) and *The East Syriac Psalm Headings: A Critical Edition* (Gorgias Press, 2013). For his work on Bible translation and the metrical version of the Psalms in Afrikaans, he received the Rev. Pieter van Drimmelen Medal from the South African Academy for Science and Arts (ASSAf). Van Rooy is a B3-rated scholar at the NRF.

Jaap Dekker

Department of Old Testament,
Theological University Kampen | Utrecht,
Utrecht, the Netherlands
Email: jdekker@tukampen.nl
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5619-839X>

Jaap Dekker studied at the Theological University Apeldoorn under the supervision of Prof. Dr HGL Peels and Prof. Dr WAM Beuken, and obtained his PhD cum laude in 2004. Since 1993, he has been a minister of several Dutch Reformed Churches (DRCs). In 1998, he was appointed as a lecturer in Biblical Studies at the Theological Seminary for these churches.

Dekker's PhD study was published in the renowned Brill Old Testament Studies Series, entitled *Zion's Rock-Solid Foundations: An Exegetical Study of the Zion Text in Isaiah 28:16*, OTS 54 (Brill, 2007). Since 2014, he has been a biblical studies and Christian identity professor at the Henk de Jong-Chair, which moved from Apeldoorn Theological University to Kampen Theological University in 2018. This university itself was, during the writing of this book, in the process of moving from Kampen to the city of Utrecht. The research of Jaap Dekker focuses on the book of Isaiah, in particular, on its theology. As visiting professor, he taught at French-speaking theological faculties in the Central African Republic (CAR) in the capital city of Bangui and the Republic of Chad in N'Djamena several times. He frequently publishes, both in Dutch and English, on Biblical-Theological themes from the book of Isaiah and co-edited *Playing with Leviathan: Interpretation and Reception of Monsters from the Biblical World*, TBN 21 (Brill, 2017) and *Reading and Listening: Meeting One God in Many Texts*, FS Eric Peels, ACEBT-SS 16 (Bergambacht NL: 2VM, 2018). Dekker was conducting a study on the Biblical Theology of Isaiah during the time of his involvement in this book.

Kathleen M Rochester

Unit for Reformational Theology and the Development of the South African Society,
Faculty of Theology, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa
Email: kmrochester@gmail.com
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5647-1774>

Kathleen M Rochester is an Australian lecturer in the Old Testament at various theological colleges in Africa, Europe, Asia and Australia, and while writing for this book, was guest lecturing at the Asia Pacific Theological Seminary and a researcher at NWU in Potchefstroom, RSA. Rochester obtained her PhD from Durham University in the UK under the supervision and mentorship of Dr Walter Moberly, which was later published as *Prophetic Ministry in Jeremiah and Ezekiel* (Peeters, 2012). She is the author of *Israel's Lament and the Discernment of Divine Revelation* (Lambert Academic Publishing, 2012), *God the Leader* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2020) and journal articles, such as 'The Missing Brother in Psalm 133' (*Expository Times*, vol. 122, no. 8, pp. 1–3 [2011]) and 'Unintegrated Suffering: Healing Disconnections between the Emotional, the Rational and the Spiritual through Lament' (*Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 270–281 [2016]). She has also ministered as a church pastor in several evangelical denominations in three countries for over 30 years. Her husband, Stuart, lectures in the New Testament, and their home base is in Tasmania, Australia, close to their four children and six grandchildren.

Lekgetho H Moretsi

Research Focus Area: Ancient Texts: Text, Context, and Reception,
Faculty of Theology, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa
Email: lekgetho.moretsi@nwu.ac.za
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3095-1777>

Lekgetho H Moretsi is a lecturer of the Old Testament and Semitic Languages in the Faculty of Theology, NWU, RSA, and was ordained as a theological professor in 2010. Moretsi obtained an MTh, wherein he concentrated on the exegetical study focusing on tithing following the book of Malachi 3:6–12. He was awarded a PhD, majoring in translation technique and translation of verbal forms in the Masoretic Text (MT) by Peshitta Psalms 73–89. He has also served as minister of the word in the Reformed Churches of Diepkloof, a large zone of the Soweto township in the Gauteng province, RSA. Moretsi has authored seven research articles in accredited and non-accredited journals; while working on this book, he was authoring his eighth article, due in 2023. He is also the author of two book chapters in 2023. He believes his calling is on the study and exegetical analysis of Psalms, especially psalms of lament, the narrative story of Former Prophets and comparative study (grammar, translation technique and translation of verbal forms in MT) in the field of the Old Testament.

Louis C Jonker

Department of Old and New Testament,
Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University,
Stellenbosch, South Africa
Email: lcj@sun.ac.za
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8181-0384>

Louis C Jonker is a distinguished professor in the Old Testament of the Hebrew Bible at Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa. He specialises in the formation of biblical literature in the Achaemenid-Persian and early Hellenistic periods (thus, in the 5th- and 4th-century BCE). Jonker works mainly on the books of Chronicles and Ezra–Nehemiah and has also played a significant role in bringing Pentateuch and Chronicles studies within hearing distance of one another. The interaction between literature formation processes that finalised the Torah (such as in the book of Numbers) and those bringing Chronicles to its final form is the focus of his latest work. He has published five monographs, three co-authored academic books, nine co-edited books, and over 100 articles and essays in accredited academic publications. He has used the category of identity negotiation in his studies on Chronicles, particularly in his book *Defining All-Israel in Chronicles* (Mohr Siebeck, 2016) and *Multi-levelled Identity Negotiation in Late Persian-period Yehud* (Brill, 2016). The last-mentioned book won the esteemed theological Andrew Murray-Desmond Tutu Prize in 2018 for the best theological publication in South Africa published between 2016 and 2018. Jonker is a B3-rated NRF researcher.

Marius Nel

Research Focus: Ecumenism: Pentecostalism and Neo-Pentecostalism,
Unit for Reformational Theology and the Development of the South African Society,
Faculty of Theology, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa
Email: marius.nel@nwu.ac.za
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0304-5805>

Marius Nel has been a research professor at the Unit for Reformed Theology of the Faculty of Theology at the Potchefstroom campus NWU, RSA, since December 2016. He specialises in apocalypticism in the Old and New Testament, the history of the Pentecostal movement and the study of its doctrine and has published research on pacifism, eschatology, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and others (LGBTIQ+) issue, prosperity theology and theodicy, all from the perspective of Pentecostal hermeneutics. Nel is a C2 NRF-rated researcher.

Matthew Haynes

Unit for Reformational Theology and the Development of the South African Society,
Faculty of Theology, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa
Email: matthew.haynes.73@gmail.com
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1503-5962>

Matthew Haynes is an independent researcher and writer who lives in North Carolina in the United States of America (USA). He also serves as an extraordinary researcher in the Faculty of Theology at NWU in Potchefstroom, RSA. Haynes is an experienced lecturer of the Old Testament for several other theological institutions: The Bible Institute of South Africa, Kalk Bay, RSA (2012–2022), George Whitfield College in Muizenberg, RSA (2019–present) and Covenant Theological Seminary (2020–2022) in Creve Coeur, Missouri, USA. Haynes' PhD thesis focused on the Sabbath commandment in Deuteronomy 5. In addition to his chapter in this publication, he has also published scholarly articles and contributed to several study Bibles.

SD (Fanie) Snyman

Department of Old and New Testament Studies,
Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of the Free State,
Bloemfontein, South Africa
Email: snymansd@ufs.ac.za
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0633-295X>

Fanie Snyman completed his studies in Theology at UP in 1979. After serving as a pastor of the DRC Nelspruit-Suid congregation for three years, he accepted a position as senior lecturer in the Old Testament at UP, RSA. He obtained his DD degree in the Old Testament from UFS in 1985, after which he was promoted to associate professor. Snyman later became professor and head of department (HoD) of the Department of Old

Testament at the UFS Faculty of Theology. He served as dean of the faculty from 2013 to 2018. Snyman was appointed as a research associate in the Department of Old and New Testament Studies in the Faculty of Theology and Religion at UFS.

Snyman's research focuses on the Book of the Twelve. Apart from numerous academic articles in various journals, he published a commentary on the book of Malachi, titled *Malachi* in the 'Historical Commentary on the Old Testament Series' (HCOT), published by Peeters Publishers in 2014. He also published a commentary on the books of Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah in the 'Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries Series' (TOTC) in 2020. Following his work on the Book of the Twelve, he authored several articles on the book of Psalms in academic journals. Snyman is a B3-rated NRF scholar.

Sebastian J Floor

Bible translation consultant with Seed Company (a member of the Wycliffe Global Alliance), Arlington, Texas, United States of America
 Email: sebastian_floor@tsco.org
 ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2607-4377>

Sebastian J Floor completed his BA and MA at the (then-called) PU for CHE, now known as NWU (RSA). Since 1989, he has worked in Mozambique among the Mwani people in the Cabo Delgado province as a linguist and Bible translation advisor. He completed a DLitt in Biblical Hebrew at Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, RSA, in 2004 with his thesis titled 'From Information structure, topic, and focus, to the theme in Biblical Hebrew narrative'. Since 2004, he has worked as a Bible translation consultant for SIL International, Wycliffe South Africa and Seed Company, providing quality assurance in more than 20 languages in southern Africa and Lusophone Africa. Floor has led Bible translation training and production workshops in Mozambique, Angola, Botswana, Kenya and South Africa. In Lubango, Angola, he initiated a translator training programme at Instituto Superior de Teologia Evangelica no Lubango (ISTEL) between 2012 and 2018. Since 2019, he has co-led an MA course in Bible translation at the Bible Institute of South Africa, a course titled 'Language and Translation in the Mission of God', sponsored by the Wycliffe Global Alliance and accredited by the Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA). He has published papers on Bantu linguistics, discourse analysis, Biblical Theology, biblical key concepts, Bible translation types, orality, Hebrew poetry and sociolinguistics. He has most recently published on the need for Bible translation in Kaaps, an Afrikaans dialect spoken throughout the Western Cape province in RSA (published online by LitNet, 2022). He is the director of a working group called PsalmsThatSing, which aims to promote the translation and performance of the psalms in local poetry.

Introduction

Albert J Coetsee

Unit for Reformational Theology and the Development of the South African Society,
Faculty of Theology, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa

Francois P Viljoen

Unit for Reformational Theology and the Development of the South African Society,
Faculty of Theology, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa

'[...] prayer is the most important part of the thankfulness God requires of us [...] God gives his grace and Holy Spirit only to those who pray continually and groan inwardly, asking God for these gifts and thanking God for them.' (*Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord's Day 45, Answer 116)

Prayer is a major topic within Christian theology. Consequently, as can be expected, much has been written about prayer in the biblical text. In fact, publications with general overviews and perspectives on prayer are numerous. Many excellent academic sources investigating prayer or types of prayer have seen the light in the last three decades. To name but a few:

- In his book *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship*, Peterson (1992) attempts to answer the question: What is worship according to Scripture? He answers this question by exegetically investigating what Scripture says about worship and the style of worship, and by providing practical counsel.

How to cite: Coetsee, AJ & Viljoen, FP 2023, 'Introduction', in AJ Coetsee & FP Viljoen (eds.), *Biblical Theology of prayer in the Old Testament*, Reformed Theology in Africa Series, vol. 12, AOSIS Books, Cape Town, pp. 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2023.BK417.00>

- Balentine's (1993) *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The Drama of Divine-Human Dialogue* remains a valuable investigation of the literary and theological functions of prayer in the Hebrew Bible within the framework of Biblical Theology.
- In *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer*, Miller (1994) discusses various themes related to prayer (e.g. the names of God in prayer, the response of God), different forms of prayer (e.g. prayers for help, praise, confession and penitence) and the prayers of certain groups or individuals (e.g. women, Jesus and Paul).

Into God's Presence: Prayer in the New Testament, edited by Longenecker (ed. 2002), is a collection of twelve essays dealing in diverse ways with (1) the setting of prayers in the Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT), in the Greco-Roman world, in the Second Temple traditions and in the Dead Sea Scrolls; (2) the songs of Luke's infancy narratives, Jesus' prayers in the Synoptic Gospels, the 'Pater Noster'-prayer, Jesus' prayer in John 17; and (3) aspects of prayer in Acts, Paul's prayer life in comparison with Jewish counterparts, intercessory prayer in Hebrews and the general epistles and three petitionary prayers in Revelation.

Crump's (2006) *Knocking on Heaven's Door: A New Testament Theology of Petitionary Prayer* investigates petitionary prayer in the NT by exploring NT passages that deal with petitionary prayer and then drawing theological and pastoral conclusions.

In the edited volume of Camp and Longman III (eds. 2015), *Praying with Ancient Israel: Exploring the Theology of Prayer in the Old Testament*, several scholars focus on the theology of prayer in the OT by covering prayer in various books and corpora of the OT.

Millar (2016), in his *Calling on the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Prayer*, follows the contours of the Bible's teaching on prayer by providing an overview of prayer in first the OT and then the NT, among others reflecting on how prayer links with God's covenantal promises and is redefined by Jesus.

As valuable as these and other investigations are, very few in-depth studies of prayers in all the corpora of the biblical text have been conducted. A comprehensive Biblical Theology dealing with the concept of prayer in Scripture has not been published before. The current volumes intend to fill this gap by investigating prayer and its related elements - including worship, praise, thanksgiving, adoration, petition, intercession, lament and confession - in both the OT and NT on a book-by-book or corpus-by-corpus basis. In addition, the concluding chapter of this publication provides a 'big picture' view of prayer in Scripture by reading the biblical material holistically through the lens of the previous chapters and providing Biblical-Theological perspectives.

In order to achieve this goal, a Biblical-Theological approach is followed, reading all of Scripture on a book-by-book basis in their final form in order to uncover the overarching theology of prayer in the Bible, understanding the parts in relation to the whole (cf. Coetsee & Viljoen 2021, pp. 5-7).¹

The advantage of this approach is that the discrete nuances of prayer of the different biblical books and corpora can be offered, letting the books and corpora speak for themselves to avoid a reductionist view on prayer and covering the whole of Scripture's revelation on this topic. In addition, by drawing the lines together, the publication gives a 'canonical synthesis' of prayer in Scripture. This approach has the added advantage of providing findings that can benefit today's Christian community.

Having decided on the aim and methodology of this publication, we invited experts on specific biblical books or corpora to contribute chapters to the publication. Without wishing to inhibit their creative writing or the specific intricacies of prayer in the biblical book(s) allotted to them, we have requested authors to follow these general guidelines:

- Provide an overview of the occurrence of prayer and worship in the book or corpus allotted to you.
- Analyse these passages where applicable.
- Focus on the unique perspectives of this book or corpus in terms of prayer.
- Elaborate on the theological contribution of this corpus concerning prayer.

This publication consists of two volumes, the first covering the OT and the second covering the NT. An overview of the chapters of the OT volume (this book) looks as follows with the authors in brackets:

1. 'Prayer in the Pentateuch' (Matthew Haynes)
2. 'Prayer in the Former Prophets' (David G Firth)
3. 'Prayer in the Major Prophets' (Jaap Dekker)
4. 'Prayer in the Minor Prophets (the Book of the Twelve)' (Kathleen M Rochester)
5. 'Prayer in the Psalms: Praise and Worship' (Fanie Snyman)
6. 'Prayer in the Psalms: Petition, intercession and lament' (Lekgetho H Moretsi)
7. 'Prayers in the Psalms: Prayers of penitence' (Herrie van Rooy)
8. 'Prayer in Job' (Edward Ho)
9. 'Prayer in Lamentations' (Gideon R Kotzé)
10. 'Prayer in Daniel' (Marius Nel)

1. In light of the chosen methodology, the current Volumes 12 and 13 in the Reformed Theology in Africa Series (of which this book is vol. 12) do not devote much discussion to historical-critical matters.

11. 'Prayer in Ezra and Nehemiah' (Sebastian J Floor)
12. 'Prayer in Chronicles' (Louis C Jonker)

The logic behind this chapter division is as follows:

- The outline above follows the order of biblical books according to the Hebrew canon.
- The Pentateuch, Former Prophets, Major Prophets, and Minor Prophets are recognised literary units, each meriting discussion in a separate chapter.
- Eight chapters are devoted to investigating prayer in the Writings. The primary reason for this is the vast number of biblical books in this corpus and traditional literary divisions. Consequently, separate chapters are devoted to investigating prayer in Job, Lamentations, Daniel and Chronicles. Because of the overlap in historical background, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are grouped together. As most psalms can be considered as prayers, three subsequent chapters investigate (1) prayers of praise, worship and thanksgiving, (2) prayers of petition, intercession and lament and (3) prayers of confession in the Psalms.²

The NT volume, *Biblical Theology of prayer in the New Testament* (vol. 13 in the current series), comprises the following chapters with the authors in brackets:

1. 'Service of the heart: Prayer and worship in early Jewish tradition' (Michael C Mulder)
2. 'Prayer in the Synoptic Gospels' (Francois P Viljoen)
3. 'Prayer and authentic spirituality in the Gospel of John' (Paul N Anderson)
4. 'Prayer and worship in the early church according to Acts' (Nina E Müller van Velden)
5. 'Thanksgiving in the Pauline Epistles' (Philip La Grange du Toit)
6. 'Worship and adoration in the Pauline Epistles' (Elma Cornelius)
7. 'Petition and intercession in the Pauline Epistles' (Rob van Houwelingen & Myriam Klinker-De Klerck)
8. 'Praying with boldness and reverence: Prayer in the book of Hebrews' (Albert J Coetsee)
9. 'Prayer in James' (M Bruce Button)
10. 'Prayer in 1 Peter, 2 Peter and Jude' (Alistair I Wilson)
11. 'Prayer in John's Epistles: Confidence of faith, fellowship and truth' (Gert JC Jordaan)

2. This book does not cover prayer in the books of Ruth, Esther, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs, because prayer is not a central theme in these books. For a discussion on prayer in the Wisdom Literature and Ruth and Esther, readers are referred to the chapters by Phillips (2015, pp. 101-116) and Kim (2015, pp. 117-134) in the edited volume of Camp and Longman III (eds. 2015).

12. 'Divine worship: Prayers from the book of Revelation' (Dirk G van der Merwe)
13. 'A Biblical Theology of prayer: A synopsis of prayer in Scripture' (Albert J Coetsee & Francois P Viljoen)

The basis for the division of these chapters is as follows:

- The volume opens with investigating prayer and worship in Second Temple Judaism to understand something of the *Sitz im Leben* of early Christian worship patterns.
- Three chapters deal with prayer in the ministry of Jesus and the Early Church, investigating prayer in the Synoptic Gospels, the Gospel of John and the book of Acts.
- The Pauline corpus³ offers extensive material on prayer. For the purpose of this book (vol. 13 in the current series), prayers in this corpus are investigated according to three categories, namely (1) thanksgiving, (2) worship and adoration and (3) petition, with a chapter devoted to each of these categories.
- Separate chapters are devoted to investigating prayer in Hebrews, James, the Johannine Epistles and Revelation.
- First and Second Peter and Jude are grouped together in separate chapters because of similarities between Jude and Second Peter.
- A concluding chapter provides a summative and overarching perspective on prayer and worship in the biblical text, based on the previous chapters.

We hope that the following investigation will be both stimulating and edifying for scholars, the church and the broader community, contributing to the practice of Reformed Theology in Africa.

3. For the purpose of the current investigation, all the letters traditionally assigned to Paul are referred to as the Pauline Corpus. Where applicable to the investigation that follows, authorship issues may be discussed.

Prayer in the Pentateuch

Matthew Haynes

Unit for Reformational Theology and the Development of the South African Society,
Faculty of Theology, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa

■ Introduction

Prayer is a subject that people innately feel they understand. Because of this, they approach the topic with preconceived notions about what it is. They also assume that others will know what prayer is and that those definitions will largely match their own – so much so that popular treatments on the subject will launch directly into a discussion without any definition of what is actually happening in prayer. Paul Miller, for example, in his monograph *A Praying Life* (2009), begins by answering the question, ‘What good does it do?’ (i.e. what it accomplishes), and then spends most of his time describing *how* one should pray.⁴ Readers are left to formulate their own understanding as to just what it is they are up to when they are praying.

At the same time, an agreed-upon formal description of prayer remains elusive. Ed Clowney (1988, p. 526) suggests that ‘prayer is communication with God in worship’. Similarly, JGSS Thompson (1982, p. 958) describes prayer as ‘worship that includes all the attitudes of the human spirit in its approach to God’. On the one hand, these definitions include different elements. ‘Communication’ (the copula compliment of ‘prayer’) is central in

4. See also Bill Hybels (1988) and Bryan Chapell (2005) for other popular-level discussions that assume a universal understanding of prayer.

How to cite: Haynes, M 2023, ‘Prayer in the Pentateuch’, in AJ Coetsee & FP Viljoen (eds.), *Biblical Theology of prayer in the Old Testament*, Reformed Theology in Africa Series, vol. 12, AOSIS Books, Cape Town, pp. 7–23. <https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2023.BK417.01>

Clowney's thinking. Thompson suggests that 'worship' is central but includes various other 'attitudes' – an aspect absent in Clowney's approach.

On the other hand, both definitions include the notion of *worship*. This, however, introduces yet another concept that can be nebulous in the thinking of modern Christians: What is worship? The answer to that question will, in turn, significantly impact one's understanding of prayer.

There are other questions as well. Although it is never categorically stated, Clowney and Thompson imply that prayer is offered to YHWH. However, can prayer be offered to an entity other than YHWH? While there is no explicit record of this in the Pentateuch, the offering of prayer to alternative deities is recorded elsewhere in the Old Testament (OT). The priests of Baal do so in 1 Kings 18:26-29, Moab in Isaiah 16:12, and there are those who serve (and apparently pray to) wooden idols in Isaiah 45:20. If the OT writers consider these to be prayers as well, then how do the prayers of these pagans relate to the definitions offered by Clowney and Thompson? Perhaps these scholars are restricting their definitions to those who are in a covenant relationship with YHWH. Other questions could be added.

This does not imply that authors of popular works like Miller are necessarily wrong in their approach; their concerns primarily address different prayer-related issues. It is, however, to say that just what people are doing when they pray is often assumed rather than delineated or argued. To develop a Biblical Theology of prayer, it must be remembered that the Pentateuch forms the front end of the entirety of the biblical narrative. Therefore, it is important to allow the text of the Pentateuch itself to describe the contours and purposes of what has become known in the common vernacular as prayer. To this end, the current chapter will follow two lines of discussion. Firstly, it will consider how the Pentateuch lays the groundwork for what later becomes understood as prayer. Secondly, it will explore the role of intercession between YHWH and his covenant partners in Exodus 32:11-14, 33:14-16; Numbers 14:13-20; and Deuteronomy 3:23-25.

■ The shape of prayer in the Pentateuch

The Hebrew root פלל primarily marks explicit reference to prayer in the Pentateuch. These references, though, are relatively infrequent and determining their precise meaning and etymology is a matter of debate. The verbal form of פלל only occurs eight times⁵ in the Pentateuch: once in the *pi'el* and the remainder as *hithpa'el*. Koehler, Baumgartner and Stamm

5. Genesis 20:7, 17 (both HtD), 48:11 (D); Numbers 11:2 (HtD); 21:7 (HtD, 2X); and Deuteronomy 9:20 (HtD), 26 (HtD).

(1967–1995, pp. 881–882) suggest that the *pi'el* and *hithpael* usages are homophones, with the *pi'el* stem indicating an act of arbitration – in other words, judging, executing judgement or having an expectation – and the *hithpael* properly expressing the notion of ‘prayer’ or, more specifically, ‘intercession’. However, both Brown, Driver and Briggs (1906, p. 813) and EA Speiser (1963) see a connection between the stems and suggest ‘to estimate [and] assess’ as a starting point. Speiser (1963) contends:

If we start out, however, with ‘to estimate, assess,’ or the like as the basic connotation, all the indicated shades of meaning fall readily into place [...] *hitpallel* becomes automatically ‘to seek consideration’, whether the specific nuance be to pray, to plead, or to intercede. (p. 305)

Understanding the various shades of lexical sense only gets us so far. In any given passage, other elements of meaning are contributed by the context to suggest the overall illocution an author intends when employing a particular word (Collins 2018, pp. 59–61). That is to say, the lexical sense of these words does not, in and of themselves, supply enough information to describe the rhetorical force those words are meant to convey in a given context. The lexical concepts of ‘prayer’ or ‘intercession’ do not fully capture the exchange between God and humanity that is provided by understanding a lexical sense by itself. That will require consideration of the contexts in which they are used and how the speaker or author seeks to shape the views of the audience who observes them.

Furthermore, while פלל formally denotes prayer, it is by no means the only way of describing such an interaction between God and humanity in the Pentateuch. Indeed, the essential feature of prayer is communication or conversation (eds. Ryken, Wilhoit & Longman 1998, p. 659). Common words such as ‘say’, ‘spoke’ and ‘call’ and more suggestive words like ‘cry’, ‘beseech’, ‘seek’ and ‘supplicate’ are found as substitutes for פלל.

■ The storyline of the Pentateuch

With this relative dearth of information using explicit language for prayer, what does the storyline of the Pentateuch itself offer to our perceptions of prayer? To get at this question, we will attempt to describe the contours of prayer, as depicted in the Pentateuch, under three rubrics: prayer as conversation, prayer as relational exchange and prayer as the embodiment of the covenant ideal.

□ Prayer as conversation

In the beginning, communication between humanity and God was accomplished verbally and face-to-face. Genesis 3:8 notes that the first human pair hid themselves in response to ‘the sound of the LORD God

walking in the garden in the cool of the day'. The conversation which follows the LORD's visitation implies that this was not an uncommon occurrence and that this was not the pair's first verbal interaction with God. In their response, they converse directly with God, in his presence (v. 10). Even after Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden, their conversation is still accomplished directly with God. In Genesis 4, after Cain murders Abel, the LORD comes to him and asks, 'Where is Abel your brother?' This begins a back-and-forth conversation which stretches from Verse 9 to the middle of Verse 15. The discussion ends with Cain going 'away from the presence of the LORD' and settling in the land of Nod, the name of which means 'wandering'.

It is after Cain's going away from the presence of the LORD that scholars locate the first 'prayer' of the Bible. When Enosh is born to Seth in Genesis 4:26, the reader is informed that 'to Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD'. While the relative distance between humanity and God has appeared to increase, the manner of communication has apparently not changed. It is still depicted as a conversation between God and humanity. Notably, Genesis 18:23-32 records an extended conversation between Abraham and the LORD as he seeks to avert the disaster that is about to befall Sodom. As he begins this communicative act, explicit mention of 'prayer' is not given. Instead, Abraham is described as 'drawing near' (v. 23) to the LORD to converse with him. At the end of the exchange, the parting is described thus: 'And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham [...] (v. 33). Examples such as this could be multiplied throughout the Pentateuch. As we shall see, each of the intercessory prayers offered by Moses is framed as a conversation.

□ Prayer as relational exchange

The conversations between God and humanity are not simply communicative acts offered solely to exchange information. They are also meant to foster the relationship between God and his people. In Exodus 17, Abraham's incredulity at the prospect of Sarah giving birth at her advanced age leads him to request that Ishmael be the means of God's blessing to him (v. 18). While the LORD insists that his covenant promises will be fulfilled through Sarah (v. 20), he also gives Abraham assurances that Ishmael will be blessed and fruitful as well (v. 20). The relationship between the LORD and his covenant partner is strengthened as Abraham acts in faith on the exchange.

Likewise, Moses' relationship with the LORD is significantly transformed as he communicates with him at the burning bush. When the LORD initially calls to Moses from the bush, Moses is fearful and 'hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God' (Ex 3:6). As the exchange progresses over Chapters 3-4,

Moses summons the courage to speak to God (Ex 3:11) and advances to finally being willing to return to Egypt to do God's bidding (Ex 4:18). While Moses' relationship with the LORD is far from fully developed at the end of this exchange, he does overcome his concern that the Egyptians will not believe that God sent him (Ex 4:1-9) and that he will not be eloquent enough to sway Pharaoh (Ex 4:10-17).

As we shall see, not only are Moses' prayers conversations with the LORD, but they are also highly relational in nature. They strengthen the bonds that tie Moses and the LORD to each other. In offering the prayers and the LORD's response to them, Moses comes to more fully understand the LORD, his character, and his plans and purposes for the world.

While the Pentateuch does not explicitly describe prayers to alternative deities, they are, at a minimum, implied. The first and second commandments' prohibition against having and bowing down to alternative deities is suggestive of the kinds of relational conversations that should only be directed toward the LORD.

□ Prayer embodies covenant ideals

Biblical covenants between the LORD and his people could be described as a committed relationship marked by mutual love and obligation.⁶ God's people's conversations with him often revolve around these elements. In Genesis 15, in response to Abraham's questions about his future heir, God takes Abraham outside and promises him offspring that are as difficult to number as the stars (v. 5). Abraham's belief in God's promise is then counted as righteousness. When Abraham asks how he will know that the LORD will give him the land he is walking on, the LORD obligates himself to Abraham through a covenant. Later, when the people cry out because of their slavery under Pharaoh, their cries reach God, and he 'remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob' (Ex 2:24).

Ultimately, these prayers and the covenant upon which they rest will be observed by the Gentile nations. As Moses exhorts the people to keep the law in Deuteronomy 4, he says this:

See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people'. For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? (vv. 5-7)

6. Adapted from Missouri Presbytery Study Committee on Federal Vision Theology (2006, p. 3).

These conversations, relationships and covenantal descriptors, therefore, belong to the broader purpose of God to bring blessing to all the peoples of the earth through Abraham.

■ **Conclusions on the general shape of prayer in the Pentateuch**

As the storyline of the Pentateuch progresses, communication between God and humanity changes. At the time of creation, there was no prayer as it is understood in the context of 21st-century Christianity. Conversation with the LORD was face-to-face. While humanity moves away from the presence of the LORD, they continue to communicate with him. These communications are presented as conversations in the Pentateuch and grounded in covenants between the LORD and his people. Furthermore, they aim to nurture and deepen the relationship between the covenant partners. God's ultimate purpose of bringing the Gentile kingdoms into his empire is also in view. With this in mind, we now turn to look at specific instances of intercession in the Pentateuch.

■ **Intercession in the Pentateuch**

■ **Exodus 32:11-14, 33:15-16**

The words of intercession found in these passages come at a crucial moment – not only in the book of Exodus but also in the relationship between God and his covenant people. Broadly, Exodus has traced the people of Israel from Egyptian captivity to covenantal freedom with God (Ex 1-24). Once the covenant has been established, the focus shifts to God's ongoing presence with his covenant people (Ex 25-40). This ongoing presence actualises a relational reality absent since Adam and Eve were removed from the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3. Alexander (2016) describes it as a:

[P]artial restoration of the broken relationship between God and humanity [...] it anticipates future developments whereby God's presence will fill a world inhabited by those who are holy as God is holy. (p. 1)

The more immediate context gives detailed instructions concerning God's habitation among his people (Ex 25-31). Here, connections with the Garden of Eden are strong. The construction requirements are given in seven instalments, each marked by the phrase 'and the LORD spoke to Moses' (Ex 25:1; 30:11, 17, 22, 34; 31:1, 12). Reminiscent of the seventh day of creation, the seventh tabernacle statement is a command to observe the Sabbath as the sign of the Sinai Covenant. The imagery of the tabernacle reflects the Garden of Eden as well. The lampstand (Beale 1999, p. 235), precious metal

and stone (Beale 2004, p. 73), and cherubim (Lioy 2010, pp. 38–39) all reverberate with Edenic overtones.

These allusions to Eden are more than semantic. The tabernacle instructions in Exodus 25–31 emphasise relational intentionality not seen since Eden. The structure of God’s new residence is repeatedly designated the *מִשְׁכָּן* [*mishkan*, tabernacle], the nominal form of the verb *שָׁכַן* [*shakan*, to dwell]. God makes his intention to be present with his people clear at the beginning of his instructions for his dwelling: ‘And let them make for me a sanctuary, that I may dwell [*שָׁכַנְתִּי*, *shakanti*] in their midst’ (Ex 25:8). God’s covenantal dwelling with his people is a central aspect of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. God uses a historical summary to emphasise the point in Exodus 29:

וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהָיִיתִי לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים: וְיָדְעוּ כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֹתָם
מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְשָׁכְנִי בְּתוֹכָם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם:

I will dwell [*shakanti*] in the midst of the sons of Israel and I will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God who brought them out from the land of Egypt so that⁷ I might dwell [*leshakni*] in their midst. I am the LORD their God.⁸ (vv. 45–46)

Knowing the LORD means recognising that the one who brought them out of Egypt covenants with them and has chosen to dwell in their midst, as evidenced by the tabernacle in the middle of their camp. Yet it is here, at the very moment when final preparations are being made for this movement back toward God and his presence, that Israel chooses to abandon the covenant. Both the covenant and the LORD’s presence with the people of Israel are now called into question. Will the LORD continue in covenant with them? Will his presence remain with them? While the golden calf episode in Exodus 32–34 presents a crisis that profoundly displays the propensity of God’s people to abandon their covenant obligations, it also provides the pre-eminent example of intercession in the Pentateuch and displays the responsive nature of God’s character.

Moses’ prayer is not spoken in a vacuum. It is a response to a speech initiated by the LORD in Verse 7. The reader has already been informed of Israel’s apostasy in Verses 1–6. The focus now shifts to the exchange between the LORD and Moses, and the LORD clarifies two things: Firstly, he intends to destroy Israel. Secondly, he will make a great nation of Moses, essentially fulfilling the promises to Abraham through him.

From the standpoint of discourse analysis, three actions form the primary line of argumentation in the events that follow the LORD’s threatened judgement. The *wayyiqtol* Hebrew verb form marks each of

7. לְשָׁכְנִי as an adjunct of purpose. See BHRG §20.1.4(1) and especially §39.11.(3)(b)(c).

8. Author’s translation.

them. The first two introduce Moses' speech in response to the LORD. The first, 'and he implored' [וַיִּתְחַלֵּץ], describes the overall manner in which Moses is approaching the LORD. The second, 'and he said' [וַיֹּאמֶר], specifies that Moses' intercession happens through speech. The final *wayyiqtol* describes the outcome of Moses' pleadings: 'And the LORD relented' [וַיִּנְחָם].

While the matrix clause text type in Exodus 32:11-14 is a historical narrative, Moses' embedded speech is hortatory,⁹ and Moses begins by asking two questions, the tenor of which implies, 'Why will you be angry?' and 'Why will the Egyptians be allowed to gloat at Israel's misfortune?' On the face of it, the first question seems absurd. The LORD has just finished telling Moses that Israel has constructed and bowed down to other gods, breaking the first two commandments. However, the Hebrew interrogative לָמָּה [why] 'borders on the negative *in order [...] not*' (JM §161*h*). The sense of both questions would then frame Moses' response thus: 'Do not be angry with your people. Do not let the Egyptians say [...].' While these two statements are formally interrogatives, they suggest a modality that is, in reality, a prohibition cast in the form of a rhetorical question seeking a negative response. The fact that Moses chooses to cast them as questions rather than the usual *lo + yiqtol* form of prohibition underscores the precarious situation of the people on whose behalf he is interceding.

Moses does not attempt to downplay the severity of Israel's transgression. Instead, Moses' concern is for the LORD's reputation. Before Israel's departure from Egypt, much was made of both the LORD's superiority to the gods of Egypt and the purpose for which he was seeking Israel's release. Moses' ongoing message to Pharaoh is that the LORD has more power than any of Egypt's supposed gods have on offer. God by supposed god, the signs that are performed through Moses and Aaron dismantle the powers of Egypt; through them, the LORD mocks Egyptian polytheism, reverses the creation account and de-creates the order of Egypt (Currid 2016, pp. 76-81). Not only is the LORD more powerful than Egypt's gods, but Israel is his 'firstborn son'. Therefore, Pharaoh must let Israel go so that he may serve the LORD. If Pharaoh should refuse, the LORD will kill Pharaoh's firstborn son (Ex 4:22-23). Moses reasons that if the LORD should now destroy Israel, the Egyptians would believe that everything that had previously happened was either a trick or a lie and that the LORD had meant to destroy Israel all along. In any case, the LORD's stated course of action would imply his disrepute among the nations.

Having stated his concern regarding what will happen if the LORD continues upon his proposed course of action, Moses suggests an alternative. These are marked by the imperatives 'turn' [שׁוּבוּ], 'relent'

9. That is to say, it is attempting to evoke a change in perspective or action by persuasion.

[וְהִנָּחֵם] and ‘remember’ [זָכַר]. The *waw* marks the first two of these as coordinating and suggesting actions that belong together. Moses asks the LORD to turn aside from his anger and, simultaneously, relent from the disaster that he is threatening. In the alternative he proffers, Moses makes a play on the word רעה that may not be apparent in English translations. In his Egyptian hypothetical, Moses warns that they will think the LORD’s actions were because of ‘evil’ [רעה√] intent to do them harm. Instead, he asks the LORD to relent from ‘this disaster’ [רעה√] against his people. Using the same kind of light touch that he used in his initial questioning of the LORD, Moses implies that the nations could view the proposed punishment as an evil action. In the end, when the LORD does relent, the same word (רעה√) is used again to describe what has been avoided.

The imperative זָכַר [zakar, remember] forms the third element of Moses’ line of argumentation. The ‘remembering’ that Moses is speaking of here is not merely a mental activity. Concrete action is expected to accompany and complement the cognitive process (Enns 2000, p. 418; McComisky 1980, p. 241). Moses’ use of זָכַר carries significant covenantal overtones. When the word is used with God as the subject, it indicates that he is about to act for the benefit of his covenant partner. When the people of Israel ‘groaned because of their slavery’ (Ex 2:24), God remembers (זָכַר√) his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The next scene in Exodus describes Moses’ call at the burning bush. Later, when the Israelites are forced to make bricks without straw in response to Moses’ initial overture to Pharaoh, Moses asks the LORD (Ex 5:22), ‘[...] why have you done evil [רעה] to this people? Why did you ever send me?’

Interestingly, as will be the case with the LORD’s threatened judgement at the golden calf, one of Moses’ primary concerns is that the LORD is about to bring disaster or evil upon Israel. The LORD responds by once again committing to ‘remember’ his people. The grounds of this covenantal remembering are the promises that he made to the patriarchs (Ex 6):

I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD’. (vv. 4-8)¹⁰

10. See Genesis 8:1, 9:15, 16, 19:29 and 30:22 for other examples of the same phenomena in the Pentateuch.

In Moses' intercession for the people at the golden calf, he also appeals to God to remember the promises made to the patriarchs (Ex 32:13a). Two aspects of those promises dominate in his request. Firstly, he reminds the LORD that he promised to multiply the patriarch's offspring as the stars of heaven. Secondly, Moses reminds the LORD that he promised that this same offspring would inherit 'forever' the land upon which the patriarchs sojourned. If the LORD follows through on his threat to destroy Israel because of the golden calf, these promises will come to nought. Amid all this activity, it is easy to overlook an observation Moses makes as he asks for these things. In invoking the patriarchs, he adds, 'to whom you swore by your own self' (v. 13). At its heart, Moses' appeal rests on God's own character. And so, despite Israel's blatant apostasy, and based on his own previous promises and his own character, the LORD relents from destroying Israel.

This does not mean that all is well. Several significant movements occur in the storyline leading to our next intercessory prayer in Exodus 33:15-16. While the LORD relents from totally destroying the people, there are consequences. The Levites kill 3,000 Israelites as Moses confronts the idolatry (vv. 26-29); the LORD indicates that a future reckoning for their sin still awaits at some point (vv. 33-34); and there is a plague (v. 35).¹¹ As difficult as these things are, even more disconcerting is the LORD's next word: He will indeed send the people into the promised land, but he will not go with them lest he consume them on the way. Instead, he will send an angel before them (Ex 33:1-3).

The immediate issue is whether the LORD will maintain his presence among his people. The whole of Exodus has been building to this point. Now, at the very moment when Moses receives the construction details for the LORD's dwelling amid his people, everything is called into question by Israel's unfaithfulness. While the LORD tells Moses that he has found favour in his sight, Moses is concerned about his ability to fulfil the task given to him by the LORD. He suggests that he does not know the LORD well enough

11. It is in this context that Moses states, 'But now, if you will forgive their sin - but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written' (Ex 32:32). Scholars both ancient (see the discussion in Childs 1972, pp. 574-579) and modern (Enns 2000, p. 577; Fretheim 2010, p. 290) have suggested that this is Moses offering himself up as an atoning sacrifice for the sin of the people on the basis that Moses told the people that he was going up to see whether he could make an atonement before the LORD (v. 30). Within Christian scholarship, it is surmised that the LORD rejected this proposal on the basis that Moses is not sinless himself and that a true atoning sacrifice must await the coming of Christ. This, however, is problematic. At no point does the text indicate that Moses is offering himself on behalf of the people. Rather, as a proper covenant representative, he is identifying with the people he represents (Stuart 2006, p. 685, n. 72). While he seeks atonement before the LORD, if there is no atonement to be had he is requesting that the LORD do with him as he plans to do with those whom Moses represents. More likely, since the LORD has indicated his ongoing pleasure with Moses (as indicated by his intention to create a new nation out of Moses himself in v. 10), Moses is requesting that the favour he has in the LORD's eyes be accounted to the people whom he represents in the covenant.

to lead the people and asks for further revelation of the LORD's character and 'ways' (Ex 33:12-13).

Additionally, he asks the LORD to remember that Israel belongs to the LORD. In response, the LORD promises two things: his presence and rest. In response, Moses again assumes the role of a covenant representative interceding on behalf of the people he represents. While only Moses has been promised the LORD's presence, he sees himself as a member of the group whom he represents (Ex 33):

וַיֹּאמֶר פָּנַי יֵלְכוּ וְהִנְחֵתִי לָךְ:

'And he said, "My presence will go, and I will give rest to you [sg]."' (v. 14)

אִם־אֵין פְּנֵיךָ הַלְכִים אֶל־תַּעֲלֵנוּ מִזֶּה:

'If your presence is not going, do not bring us [pl] up from this [place].' (v. 15)

Moses' inclusion of the people along with him continues in his explanation of why they should not leave without the LORD's presence: 'For how shall it be known that I have found favour in your sight, I *and your people*?' (Ex 33:16). Indeed, the LORD's presence with his people marks them as distinct among the peoples of the earth. The LORD accepts Moses' intercession and promises his continuing presence (Enns 2000, p. 581; Fretheim 2010, pp. 297-298).

As remarkable as these exchanges between the LORD and Moses are, what comes immediately after cannot be understated. In response to the LORD's promise to continue with Israel and in connection with Moses' previous request to know the LORD's ways, Moses asks the LORD to reveal his glory to Moses. This subsequently occurs in Exodus 34, when Moses is hidden in the cleft of a rock and the LORD proclaims concerning himself:

The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation. (vv. 6b-7)

This self-disclosure of the LORD's foundational character will become the fundamental point of departure for Israel's understanding of her covenant LORD. As will be shown in the discussion of Moses' intercession in Numbers 14, it will also become an integral aspect of their prayers.

Several initial conclusions flow from an analysis of Moses' intercessions for Israel in Exodus 32-33. Firstly, Moses' intercessions are firmly grounded in the covenant. Moses appeals to the promises the LORD made to Abraham in Genesis 15 and then reiterates to Isaac (Gn 26) and Israel (Gn 35) that he would multiply their offspring and give them the land on which they walked.

He also appeals to the covenant recently made (Ex 24), which the people have just broken, arguing that they continue to be his people (Childs 1972, p. 594; cf. Ex 33:13; 19:5-6). Moses' appeal thus begins with the covenant relationship.

Secondly, Moses' appeal is focused upon God's stated purpose to bring blessing to the nations. This was part of the purpose for which Abraham was called (Gn 12:3) and reiterated to the people of Israel before the Sinai Covenant was enacted (Ex 19:6; cf. Stuart 2006, p. 703). Moses argues that the Egyptians would see the LORD's judgement as repudiating these purposes.

Thirdly, Moses' appeal is not based upon any inherent goodness of the people. Instead, it is based upon the character of God himself. The LORD and his presence make the people distinct from the other nations of the earth.

Fourthly, the LORD relents. But this is not because Moses has changed the LORD's mind. In this, the Bible is speaking anthropomorphically. Moses' intercession was a part of how the LORD would display his mercy and lovingkindness to his people.

■ Numbers 14:13-20

Numbers 14 recounts the unwillingness of Israel to enter and take the promised land as God directed them to do. They once again grumble against Moses and Aaron, long for life in Egypt and suggest that it would have been better for them to die in the wilderness (v. 2). Anything seems better than dying by the sword in the promised land. Only Caleb and Joshua remain steadfast in their encouragement to push on into the promised land (vv. 6-9). The threats the LORD levels are remarkably similar to the golden calf incident: 'I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they' (v. 12).

While this intercession shares some similarities with the one found in Exodus 32-33, it also moves significantly beyond it. Four *weqatal* verbs provide the primary line of argumentation, forming two related pairs. In each case, they present a contingent future with consecution. In other words, Moses is treating the LORD's threat as hypothetical at this point, laying out the consequences of what will happen should the LORD definitively decide upon this course of action. The first pair, 'When they hear' [וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ] and 'then they will tell' [וַיֹּאמְרוּ], concern the Egyptians. In the Exodus 32-33 intercession, Moses only refers to the Egyptians in passing and alludes to God's ultimate plans to use Israel as the channel of blessing to the nations. Here, he discusses the Egyptians and their perspectives at length. He argues that the Egyptians, when they hear that the LORD has

definitively turned against Israel, will tell the other inhabitants of the land what has happened. The Egyptians will make the deed notorious because everyone – Egypt and all the other inhabitants of the region – are aware of the tales concerning the LORD's presence with Israel. Next, Moses puts a finer point on his hypothetical by elevating his language toward the poetic.¹² Rather than Egypt hearing about their *implied* demise, Israel's destruction is explicitly spoken of: 'If you kill' [וְהִמַּתְתָּה]. Instead of the *Egyptians* telling the inhabitants of the land what has happened, the '*nations*' [הַגּוֹיִם], who have heard of the LORD's fame,¹³ 'will say' [וַיֹּאמְרוּ]. And just what will they say? They will say that the LORD could not keep his covenant promises to Israel. That is why he killed them in the desert. Moses is, once again, tying together the themes of covenant and the LORD's reputation among the nations. If the LORD abandons Israel now, his reputation as a god who can keep his promises will be questioned among the nations whom he has purposed to bless through Israel (Wenham 1981, p. 137).

Previously, Moses claimed to be at something of a loss as to how to lead Israel. Although the LORD claimed to look favourably upon Moses, Moses did not feel that he knew enough about the LORD to lead the people well: 'Please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favour in your sight' (Ex 33:13). Now, all that has changed. Moses appeals to the LORD's self-revelation as one who is 'slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression' (Nm 14:18) as the grounds for interceding for Israel in this new rebellion. While the LORD responds positively to Moses' intercession by pardoning the people, he also invokes the second half of his self-revelation. The men who delivered a bad report of the land are immediately removed from the congregation by a plague (v. 37; cf. Ex 32:35). The generation who rebelled against him will die in the desert without setting foot in the promised land. While Moses' intercession avoids immediate death, they will bear consequences in keeping with their rebellion (vv. 22–23; cf. Wenham 1981, p. 137). Though their children will eventually have an opportunity to gain an inheritance in the promised land, they will also wander until their parents have died (v. 33).

As with the previous intercession, several conclusions can be drawn. First and most importantly, this intercession, like the last one, is grounded in the covenant between God and his people. The reason that the LORD's name would be brought into disrepute among the nations is that they would understand the situation as the LORD's inability to keep his covenant promises to Israel. Second, and closely related to the first, is Moses' appeal

12. In opposition to the 'remarkably awkward' presentation suggested by Noth (1968, p. 110), the intentionality of the text is marked by the heightened register that is associated more with poetry than prose.

13. Note that the LORD's 'fame' among the nations was one of the intended results of the LORD's presence with his people.

to God's overall purposes with Israel. By implication, Moses suggests, 'If the LORD cannot bring Israel into the promised land, how will he then be able to bless the nations?' In response, the LORD reaffirms his commitment to the covenant by promising that the second generation will enter the promised land. He thus preserves his promises by maintaining his relationship with the corporate people even though the first generation will not inherit the land (Gane 2004, p. 608).

Related to this is that, in his response to Moses' intercession, the LORD remains true to his self-revelation in Exodus 34. He does not clear the guilty – even if Moses, the covenant mediator, is the one who is seeking to intervene. At the same time, while the sin of their fathers impacts the second generation, they are not ultimately held accountable for that sin.¹⁴ Furthermore, he continues to be faithful to his promises to the patriarchs. He will indeed continue to make Abraham into a multitude of people, and he will indeed cause them to inherit the land that was promised. He also shows his lovingkindness to Joshua and Caleb, the two spies who brought back a good report (vv. 24, 30).

Finally, we can see that Moses' relationship with the LORD is deepened through his intercession on behalf of the people he represents. In the golden calf episode, Moses is tentative in his entreaties. Although he acknowledges the LORD's favour, he does not feel he knows enough about the LORD's ways to lead Israel. That hesitance is absent in this new encounter. Moses is bold in his approach. In line with the discussion above, it would appear that Moses' relationship with the LORD has become more robust, which is a primary goal of prayer.

■ Deuteronomy 3:24–28

By contrast, one final prayer of intercession is worthy of mention. In Deuteronomy 3:24–25, Moses relates to the second generation of Israelites his pleas to the LORD to allow him entry into the promised land. This particular exchange falls within the first of four addresses Moses delivers in Deuteronomy. Physically, Israel is a people on the border (Wright 1996, pp. 21–23). They have wandered for 40 years and are now, once again, on the edge of the promised land. Moses reviews their history, reminds them of why this wandering has taken place and sets the stage for his exposition of the law. After reviewing the recent victories over Sihon and Og, he describes for them a time of intercession that he had before the LORD.

14. See the argument of Boda (2009, p. 45, n. 30) on this point. Boda's basic contention is that the sins of the father impact more than just the father himself. Sin impacts entire family units (e.g. Achan and the devoted things from Ai; Jos 7:24–26). This is in contrast to Noth (1968, p. 111), who suggests that the sons are 'still atone[ing] for the apostasy ("faithlessness") of their fathers'.

As with so many other instances of prayer in the Pentateuch, this particular exchange does not use the explicit vocabulary of prayer. Rather, it uses a verb to describe the desperation of Moses' approach, followed by the infinitive 'saying'. 'At that time I plead with the LORD, saying' (Dt 3:24). His approach is marked by both an appeal to the relationship he enjoys with the LORD and a promise that he believes the LORD has made to him.

אַתָּה הַחַלּוֹת לְהִרְאוֹת אֶת־עַבְדְּךָ אֶת־גְּדֻלָּתְךָ וְאֶת־יָדְךָ הַחֲזָקָה

'You have only begun to show your servant your greatness and your mighty hand.' (v. 24a)

It is easy to miss the connection here to the previously examined intercession in Exodus 33:13, where Moses asks the LORD to show him his ways so that he may intimately know the LORD and thus lead his people well. The LORD's response to him in Exodus 33-34 was to put Moses in the rock's cleft, cause his glory to pass before him, and declare his nature. In essence, Moses' assertion in Deuteronomy is that the LORD has not yet fulfilled the promise that was made to him during the previous intercession. In one sense, this could be seen as commendable. As noted earlier, prayer is how one's relationship with the LORD is fostered and deepened; intercessory prayer is marked by an appeal to the LORD's character and promises. Moses' relationship with the LORD has deepened, and, as seen in the Numbers 14 intercessions, he knows how to enter the LORD's presence with confidence. Moses' request in Deuteronomy is framed as a means to further understand the LORD and deepen the relationship. On the face of it, the request also appears to appeal to the LORD's promise. In another sense, though, Moses' assertions could be taken negatively as an insinuation that the LORD has not kept his promise and that keeping Moses from the promised land would be a breach of that promise.

Moses' second statement also appeals to the LORD's character and his promises (Dt 3):

אֲשֶׁר מִי־אֵל בַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה כַּמַּעֲשִׂיךָ וְכַגְּבוּרָתְךָ:

'For what god is there in Heaven or on Earth who can do such works and mighty acts as yours?' (v. 24b)

Moses is using language that is reminiscent of the LORD's own statements just after his self-revelation to Moses in Exodus 34:10. As he renews the covenant, The LORD says (Ex 34):

Behold, I am making a covenant. Before all your people, I will do marvels, such as have not been created in all the earth or in any nation. And all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the LORD, for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you. (v. 10)

Combined with Moses' previous assertion, Deuteronomy 3 could be seen as, in effect, saying:

You have not yet fulfilled your promise to show me who you are, and I do not yet fully understand your ways. You should heed my petition because you are a mighty God whose works should be displayed to the nations. (v. 24)

While Moses presents this positively, it is also possible to detect a negative implication. If the LORD fails to fulfil this promise, then the nations will neither see nor recognise his mighty works on behalf of his people. This would, in turn, call the LORD's overall purpose to bless the nations through Abraham into question.

Having grounded his appeal in the LORD's character and purposes, Moses then moves on to his straightforward petition: he wants to be allowed to enter the promised land (Dt 3:25). What is striking is not so much Moses' request as is the LORD's forceful response and the culpability that Moses places upon the people. The episode to which this exchange refers and results in Moses' exclusion from the promised land is found in Numbers 20. The people grumble because of a lack of water (Nm 20:2-5). The LORD commands Moses to speak to a rock that will bring forth water (Nm 20:6-9). Instead, Moses angrily berates the people and strikes the rock with his staff (Nm:10-11). The LORD responds by telling Moses and Aaron that they will not enter the promised land because they failed to uphold God's holiness before the people (Nm 20:12). Aaron is dead before the end of the chapter. Moses is allowed to carry on, leading the people to the brink of the land. Deuteronomy 3 does not give the exact time of Moses' request, but Verses 27-29 suggest that it was near Joshua's transition into the overall leadership of Israel and close to the time of Moses' death.¹⁵

Several things are striking about Moses' perception of the LORD's response and the LORD's response itself. While Numbers 20 makes clear that Moses himself is responsible for his own actions, when he recounts the tale in Deuteronomy 3, he blames the people for what happened: 'the LORD was angry with me because of you' (v. 26).¹⁶ For his part, the LORD sees through Moses' approach and abruptly stops Moses' entreaty with a curt 'Enough!' His injunction to not speak about the matter further suggests that this might have been an ongoing request from Moses (Christensen 2001, p. 69). Despite this prohibition, the LORD's response also expresses continued patience with this servant who has served him and led his people

15. The events of Numbers 20 may not be too far distant. Just after the incident with the rock, Numbers 21 records the defeat of Kings Sihon and Og, the same events recounted for the second generation just prior to these verses in Deuteronomy 3.

16. Notice the relationship with the Garden of Eden. There, Adam blames the woman, whom God had given him, as the reason for his own failure. Here, another covenant representative blames the people, whom God had tasked him with leading, for his failure.

for so long. While Moses will not be allowed into the promised land, he will still be given the opportunity to see the place where the people are going with his own eyes (v. 27).

Given the success we have seen in Moses' previous intercessions, to what can we attribute to the LORD's denial on this occasion? A cursory reading might lead to the conclusion that Moses' prayer is marked by the same elements that should lead to a successful outcome. He appeals to God's promises which are grounded in his character. From a human vantage point, understanding Moses' perspective does not take much. More than any other human, Moses has worked tirelessly for the LORD's purposes; it seems unfair that he would be excluded from the goal at this late stage. In the end, however, Moses' prayer fails to sway the LORD because it is offered without the integrity of heart that is required for faithful intercession. In short, Moses asks for himself. As is often the case in the OT, points such as this are implied rather than explicitly stated. While it may be true that the people's grumbling precipitated the event that led to Moses' exclusion, they did not force Moses to disobey the LORD. That responsibility remains with him. Even now, the fact that he places the blame on the people indicates that his request lacks integrity.

Furthermore, while the language Moses uses is the same kind of language used when God's glory is on display, this prayer is not for the glory of God: It is for Moses' purpose of wanting to enter the land. This is about Moses rather than God. God, who can discern the heart's motivations, thus denies the request.

■ Conclusion

The groundwork for what has become prayer is found intertwined with the storyline of the Pentateuch. As the Pentateuch draws to a close, its depiction of prayer can be summarised with several emphases. Firstly, prayer, as we know it now, has replaced the face-to-face communication humanity enjoyed with God in the Garden of Eden. After Eden, humanity moves further away from the presence of the LORD, as seen in Cain's wandering, and face-to-face communication with the creator is lost. Secondly, prayer between God and his people is grounded in covenant and geared toward the fulfilment of his purpose to spread his glory to the corners of the earth and include the nations in his ever-expanding empire. Thirdly, prayer is meant to nurture and deepen the relationship between God and his people. It is a means through which his people can move into his presence. Finally, the integrity of the heart is vital for prayer in general and intercession in particular. This is exemplified in Deuteronomy's repeated refrain, 'circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart' (Dt 10:16).

Prayer in the Former Prophets

David G Firth^{a,b}

^aTrinity College,
Bristol, United Kingdom

^bDepartment of Old and New Testament Studies,
Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of the Free State,
Bloemfontein, South Africa

■ Introduction

Reflection on the theme of prayer in the Former Prophets needs to recognise the fact that there is a clear distinction between Joshua–Judges and Samuel–Kings. In the former, prayer plays a relatively minor role. Joshua, for instance, has only two clear prayers. The first of these, Joshua’s complaint in response to the initial failure at Ai (Jos 7:7–9), is based on his misunderstanding of events before it, so that YHWH’s response essentially corrects him while honouring the prayer’s concern for YHWH’s reputation (cf. Firth 2021a). The second, uttered in Joshua 10:12–14, is beset with numerous problems in interpretation (cf. Firth 2021c, pp. 197–201; Howard 1998, pp. 238–251). Although the narrator can comment on the extraordinary impact of this prayer (Jos 10:15), these uncertainties make it a difficult text from which to derive any detailed reflections on prayer. Judges, likewise, has very little that can be recognised as prayer. There are points by which Israel enquires of YHWH (Jdg 1:1; 20:18, 23, 27), but these are most likely to be interpreted as a cultic act involving priests in some way (e.g. the presence of the Ark is noted in Jdg 20:27) rather than as prayer (cf. Jdg 18:6–7).

How to cite: Firth, DG 2023, ‘Prayer in the Former Prophets’, in AJ Coetsee & FP Viljoen (eds.), *Biblical Theology of prayer in the Old Testament*, Reformed Theology in Africa Series, vol. 12, AOSIS Books, Cape Town, pp. 25–42. <https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2023.BK417.02>

Admittedly, prayer can also be understood as a cultic act, but prayer does not require the involvement of a priest. One might also interpret the weeping in Judges 2:4 (cf. Jdg 20:23, 26) as a form of wordless prayer, as is the groaning of Judges 2:18; but again, this provides us with only a very limited insight into prayer. Judges also contains numerous reports of prayer, but without recounting the content of those prayers when Israel cried out to YHWH (Jdg 3:9, 15; 4:3; 6:6; 10:10). This leaves Samson's complaint (Jdg 15:18) and request for vengeance on the Philistines (Jdg 16:28) as the only examples of individual prayer and the national complaint in Judges 21:2–3 as the only corporate one where the content of the prayer is reported, unless one also includes Judges 5:31 as prayer. However, although the amount of directly reported prayer in Judges is more or less the same as that in Joshua, it has begun a process by which the amount of prayer that is referenced has increased. This prepares for the move in Samuel–Kings, where the existence of a substantial amount of prayer is not only noted but its content is also reported. Where Judges indicates the presence of a good deal of prayer without actually recording its content, Samuel and Kings both indicate its presence and report examples of it in detail.

Because of this shift, which makes prayer a more explicitly significant theological concern, this chapter will focus on three specific prayers found in Samuel–Kings, each of which is recounted in full rather than attempting to trace all the prayers found in these texts. These include Hannah's prayer (1 Sm 2:1–10), David's response to the dynastic promise (2 Sm 7:18–29) and Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple (1 Ki 8:22–53). These are not the only prayers recounted in Samuel–Kings (e.g. note 2 Sm 22, which is the most extensive prayer in this corpus), but they do represent an important selection in that each comes from a different social setting. It is not possible in this chapter to explore the question of why we have this distinction in the content of Joshua–Judges and Samuel–Kings with regard to prayer. However, it is important to note that when read within the movement of the Former Prophets as a whole, this further emphasises the importance of Hannah's prayer, which now becomes the first substantial prayer to be recounted in the corpus. Joshua has reported only briefly on prayer, and Judges has noted a more substantial amount of prayer but without reporting much of it. Now, with Hannah's prayer, we not only have a substantial amount of prayer being offered within the narrative, but we also have its content reported.

Rather than giving space to consider what is not in the text, it is more productive to explore the rhetorical effect of this inclusion of so much prayer. That is, we focus on why such substantial examples of prayer are reported in Samuel–Kings. To do this, we offer a narrative-critical reading of each of these prayers, attending to each prayer's place and function within the relevant narrative. In doing this, we consider both the form and

content of each prayer, but beyond this, we also attend to the effects of the prayer in the balance of each narrative. Within the constraints of space available, this shall be done by noting both intratextual relations established within each of Samuel and Kings (understood as discrete but related works) and intertextual links established that cross over the boundaries of Samuel and Kings. From this, it will be seen that these prayers are presented as establishing the context for events that follow. Hannah's prayer will be seen as establishing key themes for the book of Samuel and for evaluating important events within it, with a similar function also given over to Solomon's prayer for the book of Kings. David's prayer establishes key themes for evaluating monarchy across all of Samuel-Kings, though, of course, as a piece situated within Samuel, it is also evaluated by Hannah's prayer, which means that the assessment of monarchy in Kings is shaped by David's prayer as read in light of Hannah's. These prayers are words that shape their world and also evaluate the world of which they are a part.

■ Hannah's prayer: 1 Samuel 2:1-10

Hannah's prayer is a distinct piece that clearly stands out in its context, with important shifts in style and vocabulary from the text around it (see Becker-Spörl 1992, pp. 16-17). Most obviously, the fact that it is a poem rather than prose means that most readers can appreciate its distinctiveness. Although this prayer is clearly important, it is not, in fact, Hannah's first prayer in Samuel. Earlier, she had wept bitterly and prayed for a child, vowing that no razor would touch his head should this prayer be answered positively (1 Sm 1:10-11). In this case, the prayer's content is summarised, but we are not given access to Hannah's words. Beyond this, she had continued to pray but had done so silently, her lips moving but no sound emerging, leading to the high priest Eli mistakenly assuming she was drunk (1 Sm 1:12-16). The poem, which is our main focus here, is presented as part of a pattern of prayer, something that provides further evidence for reading this as an embedded poem (see Watts 1992, pp. 19-40) and not as an insertion that can be treated on its own as has often been done (e.g. Stoebe 1973, p. 106). Likewise, although various redactional layers for the poem have been suggested (see Dietrich 2011, pp. 65-107), our concern here is with the poem as we have it because, as will become clear, the prayer establishes key themes for the whole of Samuel, something that emerges only through reading it as a whole.

Given that the narrator has already reported the prayer and summarised its content, why pause to recount the specific content of this prayer, especially as it does not develop the plot of the narrative (see Bailey 1995, p. 213)? Indeed, if the only concern is the development of the plot, then it is perfectly possible to move from 1 Samuel 1:28 to 1 Samuel 2:11 without

any particular sense of loss. Yet it is precisely this element of narrative redundancy that makes it so important. The narrator has paused the hitherto rapid movement of time in the story, a pace that will be resumed after the prayer, to include it. In doing so, it is marked as a text of particular importance, though the ways in which it is finally important are only fully revealed by a reading of the whole of Samuel. That it is a poem embedded in a mass of prose also helps focus the reader's attention on the prayer. As this prayer is also offered in response to YHWH answering Hannah's earlier prayer, it means it comes as a climax to the narrative so far, meaning that it is a point of particular focus anyway. When combined with the narrative redundancy and change in the flow of time, it becomes clear that the narrator has taken care to present Hannah's prayer as a key focal point for readers. All this clearly indicates that it is a narrative and theologically significant text for the book. It is not simply a poetic piece that was available to the narrator but rather a key text that is crucial both as the climax of the narrative to this point and for what follows.

Following Hannah's previous silence, the introduction to her prayer with the words 'Hannah prayed and said' becomes more important. Although Lewis (1994, p. 25; followed by Tsumura 2007, p. 136) wishes to delete 'prayed' based on one LXX manuscript as *lectio brevior*, it is better to follow the Masoretic Text (MT) at this point. This is not only because the combination 'prayed and said' is a recognisable idiomatic expression (e.g. Dt 9:26; 2 Ki 6:17-18; Jnh 2:1-2) which might have been smoothed out into more idiomatic Greek in this manuscript, but also because the idiomatic expression itself is important in this setting. Hannah's earlier prayers have been reported and even silent, but now she speaks. Most importantly, we know Hannah speaking in her own words as she reflects on her position as one who has transitioned from what is effectively the world of lament [*Klage*] to one of thanksgiving. Indeed, it is important to note that the narrative of 1 Samuel 1 has carefully mapped Hannah's experience to the world of the lament psalm so that, just as those psalms often anticipate a future point of thanksgiving, her prayer now provides that thanksgiving (cf. Van Zyl 1984).

Structurally, the prayer can be divided into three distinct stanzas based on the dominant pronoun. Tracing this through, it can be observed that the prayer moves from the first person to the second person before using the third person for its third stanza (cf. Firth forthcoming). Hence, the first two verses are addressed to YHWH from Hannah's own perspective. There are some third-person elements which anticipate the broader audience for the third stanza. However, these are typical of thanksgiving poems which often move between the first and third person when addressing YHWH (cf. Ps 30). Here, Hannah expresses her own joy in YHWH as she rejoices in his salvation, which contextually is to be understood as Samuel's birth. In Verse 3, the poem shifts into the second person, addressing an undefined audience

who need to learn from Hannah's experience. The audience could include her rival Peninnah, but the plural form of address here indicates that a wider group is intended. This audience is assumed to have spoken proudly in a manner which seems to exclude the possibility of YHWH acting (perhaps thinking like the fool from Ps 14). But this group is warned that YHWH is not only a 'God of knowledge', he also weighs human actions. As such, this group needs to learn from Hannah's experience, though the admonition also shows that the prayer is informed by Israel's wisdom traditions (cf. v. 9b, which Long [2020, p. 46] links to proverbial texts). Within the literary context, it is also probable that Hannah's voice is one through which the narrator directly addresses the reader, breaking the 'fourth wall' as it were, so that Hannah's words to her audience are now the narrator's words to readers who are also called to consider what it means to know that YHWH is a God of knowledge who weighs human actions. The third stanza (vv. 4-10) is then addressed to a wider audience which now includes both Hannah's presumed audience and the readership of the book of Samuel as the poem draws on the reversal of fortunes motif to insist that YHWH acts for the weak against the powerful and that the attempt to sustain power for oneself is therefore fundamentally self-defeating. Rather, all are called to align themselves with the weak, the position from which Hannah herself has prayed. Perhaps surprisingly at this point in Samuel, the prayer closes by insisting that YHWH exalts the horn of his anointed king - surprising because before this there has been no indication in the book that kingship is an issue. Yet, by introducing the theme of kingship here, it becomes clear that Hannah's prayer offers a prophetic perspective (with Klement 2000, pp. 112-113), and it is this perspective that is also a mechanism that establishes the prayer's function for evaluating events across the rest of Samuel. This closing link also joins the king's experience to Hannah's own by means of inclusion as both Hannah and the king are said to have their 'horn' exalted. Although the 'horn' is a symbol of power in the Old Testament (OT), the association of the king with Hannah here, and the clear indication that any attempt to hold power as an end in and of itself is doomed to fail, suggests that a very different attitude to kingship than might be expected is also being developed at this point. YHWH's king is coming, but this king will be quite unlike any other because only by trusting in YHWH as Hannah has trusted can this king's power be exalted. Any attempt to claim and control power is doomed to failure because YHWH both brings low and exalts (v. 7). Hannah's prayer thus anticipates kingship, but not kingship as it was otherwise known (cf. Firth 2021b).

Much more can be said about the prayer itself, but the above sketch must suffice. More importantly for our purposes, we also need to note the ways in which Hannah's prayer becomes a key lens through which we read Samuel, both as a work that anticipates events that are to follow and also

as a key point of reference by which we evaluate those events and the characters we encounter within the book. Hannah's prayer is thus not only human speech addressed to God but also a key means by which the narrator guides readers through what follows in Samuel. Hannah's words shape the world in which they are presented, celebrating that God has changed her world in response to her earlier prayer while also encouraging readers to see a similar function in prayer. Perhaps most remarkably, Hannah prays as someone who comes from a lowly position, and yet it is through her that we see the changes that YHWH is initiating in bringing about a monarchy (cf. Brueggemann 1990). A monarchy is coming, and Hannah's prayer announces this fact as well as creating a framework for evaluating it.

In appreciating how Hannah's prayer is presented as shaping its world, we need to briefly explore the ways in which the subsequent narrative in Samuel picks up key themes and concepts from the prayer. Of particular importance, we need to note the close links between the prayer and the 'Samuel Conclusion' (2 Sm 21-24; for this terminology rather than the more common 'Appendix', see Klement 2000). However, the connections between Hannah's prayer and the rest of Samuel go beyond the beginning and end of the book because key elements in the prayer recur at pivotal points throughout the book.

One important link can be seen in the important role played by the other embedded poems in Samuel (cf. Firth forthcoming). Hannah's prayer is embedded in the book's opening. It is balanced by David's two poems (2 Sm 22; 23:1-7) in the conclusion, with these forming the heart of a widely recognised chiasm that holds the conclusion together (see especially Simon 2000). The importance of these poems can also be seen in David's lament over Saul and Jonathan (2 Sm 1:17-27), as it also occurs at the key turning point in the narrative as David then prepares to become king. In all, these embedded poems provide a crucial structural element for the book, with all of them concerned with kingship in some way. Although not as evident in translation, each of these poems is linked to the others by shared vocabulary associated with kingship, not only because of the military language found in each but more specifically through repetition of the word משיח in each.

In addition, we have already noted that 'horn' [קרן] is a key term for Hannah's prayer, marking its boundaries. But Hannah's prayer is also joined to David's thanksgiving (2 Sm 22), which also points to YHWH as the horn of David's salvation (2 Sm 22:3). The point here is that YHWH is the source of David's strength, but the connections to Hannah's prayer also indicate that the way to derive strength is to receive it from YHWH and not to strive for it by oneself. David is far from morally clear in Samuel, and not only in the Uriah story in 2 Samuel 11, yet it also remains true to say that he has understood that it is YHWH who has provided him with strength,

a point that is directly affirmed in 1 Samuel 30:6. This stream of David's characterisation in Samuel finds its focus in his thanksgiving, but it is a focal point that has been established by Hannah's prayer. We might also note that when David is anointed by Samuel, the oil is in a horn (קֶרֶן, 1 Sm 16:13); unlike Saul, for whom the oil was in a 'flask' [פֶּךָ]. In this case, the term used to describe the oil's container evokes Hannah's prayer and its reflection on YHWH raising the weak at the very point where the youngest of Jesse's sons is being anointed.

Connections between Hannah's prayer, David's anointing, and his own thanksgiving provide a key prism through which to read David's story. This connection is further enhanced by David's 'Last Words' (2 Sm 23:1-7), which also shows linguistic connections to Hannah's prayer. Here, David is YHWH's anointed, the one raised up by the God of Jacob (2 Sm 23:1). The introduction to this closing poem thus makes important connections to Hannah's prayer, which has also insisted that it is YHWH who raises up (1 Sm 2:6). Although the verb here is different from Hannah's prayer, there is a clear correlation with the motif of YHWH as the one who raises up. In his Last Words, David is forced to understand that he can rule only when he accepts YHWH's authority over him and that any monarch who grasps power for himself is doomed to fail. There is much in the presentation of David in Samuel that is rightly troubling to readers, but here in the book's conclusion he grasps the truth that Hannah's prayer had already announced and understands that it is only on this basis that his dynasty is secured.

Although other links between Hannah's prayer and the rest of Samuel can be noted, for our purposes, it will suffice to note one other element: the 'thunder' motif. Within the prayer, it occurs in the closing note of 1 Samuel 2:10 when it is said that YHWH 'thunders' against his enemies in the heavens; part of the process by which they are broken. That YHWH defeats his enemies is a core element of the OT, but the 'thunder' motif as part of this receives particular emphasis in Samuel. We should note that the theme has, like prayer itself, been introduced earlier in the book as Peninnah's vexing of Hannah would lead her to 'thunder' (1 Sm 1:6; the common glosses 'irritate' or 'provoke' in English translations aim to translate by sense, but in so doing lose the connection as both cases use the verb רָעַם). The motif in the prayer is itself linked to the narrative in which it is embedded, anticipating further occurrences of the motif across the book.

An initial instance is found in 1 Samuel 7:10. Here, the Philistines have gathered to attack Israel while they were at Mizpah, participating in a ritual led by Samuel to indicate their return to YHWH. Israel, at this point, is highly vulnerable because they are in worship rather than prepared for war, and yet YHWH 'thunders' against the Philistines, routing them before Israel after they had been thrown into confusion. What Hannah has announced in her prayer has indeed occurred. This motif recurs in David's Thanksgiving

Song, which declares (2 Sm 22:14) that YHWH ‘thundered’ in defeating David’s foes, though the wider context of the song also makes clear that these were YHWH’s enemies. Once more, a motif from Hannah’s prayer finds important echoes across Samuel, enabling readers to see the reality she has announced in her prayer while also evaluating the actions of figures like David. Hannah’s prayer has both shaped the world of which it is a part and enables readers to evaluate those within it.

■ David’s response to the dynastic promise – 2 Samuel 7:18–29

David’s prayer, following Nathan’s oracle, is in many ways quite different from Hannah’s, though we shall also note some significant points of contact between them. Where Hannah’s prayer is poetry, David’s is prose – though it is carefully structured prose that employs elevated language. Hannah’s prayer, through its shifts in addressee, functions both as a report of her own words and a means by which the narrator addresses the book’s audience, but David’s prayer is consistently addressed to God alone. Yet, these differences should not lead us to drive too deep a wedge between them because there is a great deal that holds them together. Most fundamentally, David’s prayer is no more necessary for the development of the plot in Samuel than was Hannah’s prayer in its context. In this case, Nathan’s oracle (2 Sm 7:3–17) has addressed his desire to build a temple, making clear that David was not the one to build the temple, though YHWH would raise up a son who would do so while also building a house for David. As this is presented as an extended oracle from YHWH, the longest such divine speech in the Samuel, it is sufficient to resolve the topic of both the temple and David’s house. Yet, as with Hannah, the narrator includes an extended prayer from David. Questions have been raised about the relationship of the prayer to the surrounding material. McCarter (1984, pp. 239–240), for example, suggests that the prayer was originally associated with the arrival of the Ark in Jerusalem, though he is also conscious of its canonical context. However, the use of keywords from the preceding oracle (notably, בית, לעולם, עבד) all suggest a close integration with the current context (cf. Murray 1998, p. 225), meaning that it is best understood against its present literary setting (cf. Avioz 2005, pp. 38–42; Firth 2009, pp. 389–390). If so, then, like Hannah’s prayer, we need to read it as a text where the very redundancy of its content points to its importance for the narrative. Like Hannah’s prayer, the simple fact that the narrator slows the pace of narrative time to report this prayer is a key mechanism by which our attention is focused on it, highlighting its theological importance for the narrative.

Other connections with Hannah’s prayer should also be noted. First, where Hannah’s prayer had anticipated YHWH raising the horn of his

anointed, the promise to David has come to him as YHWH's anointed, and indeed the promise of a dynasty (house) for David is a means by which his power (i.e. his 'horn') is demonstrated. David is the king Hannah had anticipated, and for all his imperfections within Samuel, he remains the chosen one. Yet, even as David prays, his words here also have an important connection with Hannah's prayer in that he recognises the reversal of fortunes motif that was so prominent in Hannah's prayer in his own experience. David recognises YHWH's greatness and that it is YHWH who has established not only his own house but also Israel before him. Both have been brought to prominence because of YHWH's commitment. That is, David sees himself as one who has been raised up (cf. 1 Sm 2:8). Moreover, for Hannah, YHWH is a God 'of knowledge' (1 Sm 2:3), and it is YHWH who communicates knowledge to David (2 Sm 7:21). Thus, although David's prayer is to be read in its own terms, it too is a text that is read through the prism of Hannah's prayer.

As with Hannah's prayer, David's is also a carefully structured piece (cf. Firth 2009, p. 390). Most simply, it can be broken down into two main sections, with Verses 18-24 primarily as thanksgiving and Verses 25-29 primarily as petition. This factor alone represents a significant shift in comparison with Hannah's prayer, all of which can be classified as thanksgiving. But this simple division can mask the fact that each section is a carefully composed whole. The thanksgiving is built around three rhetorical questions (vv. 18, 20, 23). These questions are themselves arranged as a small chiasm, as can be seen from the interrogatives used:

- A. 'Who is David ...' (מי)
- B. 'And what more ...' (מה)
- A. 'Who is Israel ...' (מי)

As well as the chiasm, there is also progression within the questions, as the first two focus on David as the one who has received the promise from YHWH, whereas the third question looks to Israel as the nation who have especially benefitted from YHWH's activity for them. Likewise, the petitions are built around a threefold structure, with each petition introduced by 'and now' [ועתה] occurring in Verses 25, 28 and 29. The petitions themselves occur in Verses 25 and 29, with each built on paired imperatives (הקם and עשה in v. 25, הואל וברך in v. 29). The prayer is also introduced with a note that David went and sat before YHWH before offering it. Given that the Ark was in a public site in Jerusalem (2 Sm 6:17; 7:1-2), it is likely that this means that David's prayer is a consciously public act. When going before YHWH, David is presented as responding to an oracle that was given to him in private publicly. As such, although the prayer is, in the first instance, offered to YHWH, there is a wider audience that is already implied. This prepares in part for Solomon's prayer at the temple's dedication, not only because

Solomon is the one permitted to build the temple, but also through the pattern of a royal prayer which is meant to be overheard by a wider audience. If so, then this is also a prayer that is intended to make important statements about the Davidic dynasty, both through its reflections on Nathan's oracle and also through connections it draws with the promise to Abraham (cf. Wright 2006, p. 228). Solomon's prayer, of course, draws on the promise of 2 Samuel 7, so there is already a close connection between these prayers, but this is strengthened by the fact that both are public royal prayers. This differs from Hannah's prayer, which is presented as the prayer of a private individual, though of course it too assumes that a wider audience is addressed. Yet, although this prayer focuses on David's dynasty, it also reflects on David as an individual, so that it sits at the mid-point between Hannah's prayer and Solomon's, one that fuses David as an individual and David as king.

As noted, that David prays before YHWH indicates that this is a public prayer, even though the oracle to him from Nathan was not itself public. This movement also indicates something important about David and YHWH's relative power - YHWH could send a messenger to David, but David must come before YHWH (cf. Murray 1998, p. 201). Hannah's prayer had anticipated a king who would be YHWH's anointed (1 Sm 2:10), and such a king must always be subservient to YHWH. There are hints in 2 Samuel 6 that David was attempting to bring the Ark to Jerusalem to buttress his own power (note in 2 Sm 6:9, he is concerned about bringing the Ark 'to me' [אלי]), but Nathan's oracle has made it clear that even though he was king, he remained subservient to YHWH. Although Samuel never explains why David was not to build the temple, there is enough evidence in the greater narrative to indicate that the concern was with David attempting to claim power for himself through the Ark and temple. However, YHWH's response demonstrates that a king in Israel lacked that right, and hence it was YHWH who would determine who would build the temple. Admittedly, such a reading of 2 Samuel 7 has been challenged by Lyle Eslinger, as he denies that YHWH actually makes a promise to David here (1994). However, his focus on the supposed rhetoric of the characters within the chapter, though aware of ambiguities in it, fails to attend to the importance of the voice of the one narrating the whole story, and when attention is paid to this voice, it can be seen that YHWH does indeed make an important promise to David here (Firth 2005). David's prayer thus starts from the perspective that he does not have the power that he would like, but also that YHWH's promise in fact gives him something better than he had previously attempted to gain. As a public prayer, this also communicates something about the status of the king to a wider audience, perhaps also hinting as to why the prayer has been given such prominence within the book.

Aspects of the thanksgiving are difficult to interpret, especially David's statement in Verse 19 which summarises the promise given to him as תורה [for humankind]. We should probably understand this statement as indicating that the nature of YHWH's promise to David, when understood as an act of grace, offers a form of instruction for humankind. If so, then we should perhaps link it to David's statement to Goliath (1 Sm 17:46). There, David asserted that his victory over Goliath would enable all the earth to know that 'there is a God in Israel'. If so, then David immediately recognises the fact that YHWH's offer of a dynasty for him provides hope for more than Israel, as the reason for Israel's existence is to live out the reality of being God's people before all the earth. Such a reading is consistent with the contrast between the opening statement of the smallness of David's house and the greatness of YHWH's promise that runs through the thanksgiving, and which culminates in the third of the rhetorical questions. The point here is to note that Israel's relationship to YHWH is distinctive among the nations and that the promise to David is to be seen within this context. Moreover, YHWH has gained renown [שם] through Israel and continues to do so through his promise to David, a promise which is to be seen in the context of both the exodus and the entry into the land. The promise to David is now a fundamental part of what it means to declare that YHWH and Israel live in a covenant relationship.

The petitions then flow from thanksgiving, building on this understanding of the promise as something now integrated into Israel's covenant relationship with YHWH. Although there are only two petitions as such (vv. 25, 29), this section of the prayer also follows a three-part structure based around the occurrences of 'and now' [ועתה] in Verses 25, 28 and 29. However, the second and third occurrences of this formula are also joined by sharing the one petition.

The first petition might almost seem redundant as David asks YHWH to confirm [הקם] the word that he has spoken and thus do [עשה] what he has said. Given that an enduring relationship was promised in Verse 16, is this necessary? Yet, there is some development here in that the statement in Verse 16 might be taken to refer only to David's throne, so David is, in effect, asking for confirmation that YHWH's promise is also for David and his house. But the more important development is that David's request is expressed in terms of how YHWH is to be perceived. That is, David's prayer focuses not so much on the development of his own house (though it is certainly not ignored) but, more importantly, on how YHWH's greatness is understood. David's house can be established before YHWH [בנון לפניך], but it is YHWH's renown that is to be magnified [ויגדל שמוך עד-עולם]. Although Brueggemann (1985, p. 80) has argued that David is here simply attempting to make YHWH Israel's state patron, the reality is more subtle than that because it presents YHWH as Israel's deity before the nations, a motif that

becomes more prominent in Solomon's prayer. Rather than attempting to seduce YHWH through his rhetoric (cf. Eslinger 1994, pp. 84–85), David recognises that his house can have status only if YHWH receives greater honour. The petition does want to see David's house established, but it does so on the basis that YHWH needs to receive greater renown. It is this that then moves into the second petition, though the place of the second 'and now' does need to be noted. It needs to be noted because it places the petitions once more in the context of a doxology which is built on the reliability of YHWH's word, the theme of the first petition. As such, the second petition is really an extension of the first, as it asks for YHWH to bless David's house. The blessing is the right of his house to remain in YHWH's presence. This petition also understands that David's house can only flourish if YHWH enables it, meaning the greater honour goes to YHWH. Where Hannah's prayer had emerged from the lived experience of the complaint psalms and David's from a divine promise, they are joined by their concern that the king should remain as YHWH's king rather than as an independent figure, something joined with the concern that YHWH's glory be seen by others.

As with Hannah, the impact of David's prayer goes well beyond its immediate literary context. That is, although it remains both a thanksgiving for the promise of a house from YHWH and a prayer for YHWH to establish this promise (and so is closely tied to the promise), it also echoes with texts that follow it. Again, only some samples can be provided. Staying first within Samuel, we can note the echoes of this prayer in David's 'Last Words' (2 Sm 23:1–7). This passage provides several difficulties in interpretation, but for our purposes it is sufficient to note the reference in Verse 5 to David's house and the covenant that now stands between David and YHWH. Within Samuel, the intervening chapters have shown the darkest side of David's character, with the adulterous relationship with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah (2 Sm 11), and then the chaos of Absalom and Sheba's rebellions (2 Sm 14–20) after David's ineffective response to Amnon's rape of Tamar (2 Sm 13). These events are presented as the outworking of David's punishment from the events of 2 Samuel 11. It is striking to note, therefore, that when Nathan announces this punishment (2 Sm 12:10), it is that the sword shall not depart from David's house [בית], thus picking up on a key term from both the promise and the prayer. It is perhaps impossible to say which has the greater impact here, but perhaps we might suggest that the prayer is more important precisely because it had asked YHWH to bless David's house so that it remained before YHWH, whereas the earlier promise had only assured David that YHWH would not remove his commitment from the promised descendant as had been the case with Saul (2 Sm 7:15), though this does then assure David of the security of his house (2 Sm 7:16). But by the time we reach 2 Samuel 23:1–7 we have seen

a David who has been disciplined but whose faults remain particularly clear. David does not claim here that he is faultless, but merely that his house stands in a proper relationship with God. Within Samuel, this indicates that YHWH continues to bless David's house, despite David's failings, showing that he has indeed grasped the point of Hannah's prayer and his own, which is that kings can only truly reign when they are submitted to YHWH (Firth 2001, pp. 220–221). Moving beyond Samuel, we can also see the impact of David's prayer across the book of Kings, which typically uses David as the means for assessing Judah's kings. David is not the model king because of his exemplary behaviour – indeed, 1 Kings 15:4 makes it clear that the book of Kings was aware of David's failings. Nevertheless, both in 1 Kings 15:4–5 and 2 Kings 8:18–19, we are told that YHWH continued to act for David despite the failings of his heirs. Again, it is difficult to disentangle the impact of YHWH's promise and David's prayer in these passages, both of which are also linked by the 'lamp' motif. Given that the prayer is embedded in the account of the promise, the text does not encourage a firm division.

Nevertheless, through these statements, the narrative of Kings continues to affirm that the promise to David stands and that David's prayer is being honoured. David's prayer differs from Hannah's in that it does not give readers a means for evaluating others, but it is consistent with Hannah's in being a prayer that (in conjunction with YHWH's promise) shapes the world of which it is a part.

■ Solomon's prayer – 1 Kings 8:22–53

As a final example, we consider Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple, one of the longest prayers found in the OT. Accordingly, rather than providing an overview, the discussion here will be focused on our main concern, how this prayer is both integrated into its current literary setting and how it shapes the narrative that follows. In this case, it is also important to note that the prayer builds on themes from 2 Samuel 7, meaning that it is also part of a web of prayers across Samuel–Kings which explore themes of kingship and worship and how these elements come together under YHWH's authority. Strikingly, just as we had noted that David's prayer demonstrated a concern for the nations beyond Israel, so also Solomon's prayer extends this focus while also preparing for elements in Kings which point to the importance of foreigners for Israel (cf. Firth 2019, pp. 143–146).

Although there are numerous disputes about the exact structure of the Solomon narrative (1 Ki 1–11; cf. Hays 2003; Olley 2003; Parker 1992), there is general agreement that the construction of the temple and its dedication forms the heart of Solomon's presentation. Likewise, although assessments of Solomon vary considerably, there is general agreement that Solomon's prayer is a high point in his reign. Even Hays (2003), who reads the

presentation of Solomon more critically compared to many others, finds no major points of concern in the prayer. In any case, as the prayer comes after YHWH's glory has filled the house (1 Ki 8:11), we can agree with Wray Beal (2014, p. 132) that this represents the highest point of Solomon's reign.

Even more than was the case with David's prayer, this is a public prayer, one that is presented as an act of a king before his people. Even before the prayer's formal beginning, it is placed in a context of public worship led by Solomon in which he explicitly ties the temple's construction to the promise to David (1 Ki 8:12-21). Solomon portrays himself as the one who was to build the temple and provide a place for the Ark, thus going beyond what David had been permitted to do. Admittedly, there is no antecedent for the words that Solomon claims YHWH spoke about David (1 Ki 8:18-19), and they can be read with some suspicion, but they are still broadly consistent with the promise from 2 Samuel 7:12-13 and can reasonably claim that David's intention in wishing to build the temple had been honouring towards God, even if one might also conclude that such an affirmation also works well for Solomon.

Although it includes an introductory section that can properly be considered as prayer in Verses 23-30 (v. 22 situates Solomon as he offers the prayer), we can appropriately regard this section as separate from the main body of the prayer in that it provides introductory material rather than the central petitions (cf. Schmid 2000, p. 337). Nevertheless, these words still form an important frame for reading the body of the prayer in that they tie the subsequent petitions to the promise to David in 2 Samuel 7. Thus, the prayer is tied to the statements already made to the assembly, though by raising this connection with YHWH it also effectively grants him permission to demonstrate that Solomon's presentation of this matter is incorrect. By asking that YHWH confirm his word to David (1 Ki 8:26), Solomon's prayer echoes David's own prayer (2 Sm 7:25) while leaving space for YHWH to indicate that Solomon's representation of events might be incorrect. The introduction also recognises the fact that YHWH cannot really be contained within the temple, though at the same time it is a place where he might be present (Kamp 2016; this is a tension explored elsewhere within the OT; cf. Hearson 2020). However YHWH's presence might be construed, the more important matter here is that he has agreed that his name would be present in the temple and that it is therefore a place to which he will be attentive. As such, when YHWH's servant cries out towards the temple, then it is a place to which YHWH will attend and so may hear and forgive those who pray. That YHWH should hear the prayers offered is not surprising, but the introduction of the motif of forgiveness at this point is striking. This is the first time the verb סָלַח occurs in the Former Prophets, though it will occur again in Verses 34, 36, 39 and 50. This verb is notable because it refers to a mode of forgiveness that may only be given by God and so represents a

mode of forgiveness not previously noted in this corpus. Tying this to the temple is both logical and surprising – it is logical, because if the temple is a place to which God is attentive, then it is right that one should use it as a place to request forgiveness. However, it is surprising because a temple is more typically known as the place where sacrifices take place, and one might otherwise expect that sacrifice would be the mechanism by which forgiveness was offered (Knoppers 1995, p. 230). Yet the prayer allows for prayer alone to be the mechanism by which forgiveness is granted.

Once the introductory role of Verses 22–30 is noted, we can observe that the body of the prayer (vv. 31–53) is a carefully composed unit, built around seven central petitions, with these commencing in Verses 31, 33, 35, 37, 41, 44 and 46. Beyond this, Davies (2012) has noted that the prayer as a whole is built around heptadic verbal patterns, and recognising this fact suggests that the proposal that at least the sixth and seventh petitions are expansions on the original prayer (cf. De Vries 2003, pp. 120, 126) is unlikely. Rather, the prayer is a carefully integrated whole that explores the theme of forgiveness in light of YHWH's commitment to Israel through David (cf. Boda 2009, pp. 168–169). This heptadic pattern across the prayer points to a typical feature of public prayers that are addressed to God but also intended to be heard – and thus remembered – by a wider audience. That wider audience is presumed to include those present for the temple's dedication, though it now includes all who read this prayer within the book (cf. Cogan 2001, p. 291). Unlike Hannah's prayer, where the author can address readers through the shift of pronouns, the effect is achieved here by the openness of the term 'servant' [עַבְדִּי]. As Solomon's prayer has already identified YHWH's servants as those who walk before YHWH with a whole heart (1 Ki 8:23), the 'servant' who might pray to YHWH moves beyond Solomon and Israel more generally to anyone who now prays. Indeed, this possibility that is embedded in the prayer's introduction then becomes explicit in the prayer's body, especially in the fifth petition (vv. 41–43) in its concern for the foreigner. This prayer, too, looks beyond Israel to consider those beyond Israel's borders.

That the prayer's introduction concludes with a request for forgiveness indicates that this is a key motif within the prayer, unsurprisingly linked with the motif of sin. As we have noted, the verb סָלַח occurs four times in the prayer, in petitions 2, 3, 4 and 7. Although there is some variation in the language across these petitions (cf. Talstra 1993, p. 196), there is enough here that is consistent to understand this as variations on a theme. In petitions 2, 3 and 7, an explicit statement of sin is made, creating an obvious context for forgiveness. No such statement is found in petition 4, but in this case the clear associations with the covenant punishments of Deuteronomy 28 are sufficient to indicate that sin is involved and thus needs resolution. Petitions 1, 5 and 6 lack explicit reference to forgiveness.

However, petition 1 speaks of someone sinning against a neighbour and the need for YHWH to condemn the guilty and vindicate the righteous, so the motif of sin is sustained here. Likewise, petition 6 speaks of Israel being defeated in battle and then praying towards the city where the temple is located. Although sin is not mentioned here, the background of Deuteronomy 28 again indicates that this is understood as an outcome of sin, so the requested response of YHWH maintaining their cause also assumes forgiveness. In this instance, we should perhaps say that it is assumed as a background, as it could have been made explicit; but within the larger context, forgiveness remains a feature even here.

All this makes the absence of this motif from Petition 5 stand out more clearly. In this case, the prayer is particularly concerned with a foreigner [נכרי], one who is not resident in Israel. One can certainly assume that this foreigner who, having heard of YHWH's great reputation and power, comes to the temple to pray because of a need for forgiveness. But though this is an implicit element because of the prayer's introduction, the focus of this petition is different from the others. Here, YHWH is asked to respond to 'all that the foreigner requests of you' [ככל אשר ייקרא אליך]. Although this might include forgiveness, and perhaps assumes the content of the other petitions being applied to the foreigner, there is a more important outward focus here, which is so that all the peoples of the earth might know and fear YHWH (cf. 1 Ki 8:60). This is linked in the prayer's conclusion to the position of Israel as the people YHWH had separated out to be his own heritage (1 Ki 8:53). Israel may know YHWH because he responds to their petitions, but all the peoples of the earth may also know him because he responds to their petitions too. The temple is thus the place where all may pray, a gift given to Israel which continually allows for their relationship with YHWH to be restored through forgiveness, and also the place where prayers of foreigners become a witness to all peoples of YHWH's reputation and power.

Again, we can only note limited examples of how the prayer finds literary echoes in the rest of Kings. Here, we find a remarkable confluence of this concern for forgiveness and also the place of the foreigner. We may begin by noting the visit of the Queen of Sheba (1 Ki 10:1-13). We are told that she came because she had heard the fame of Solomon concerning YHWH's reputation (שם - 1 Ki 10:1). The prayer had assumed that a foreigner might come to Jerusalem because of YHWH's name (1 Ki 8:41-42), and the Queen is the first figure in the book to act in this way. Nevertheless, that she finally sees Solomon's splendour and wisdom but does not pray may be a hint of how things will go wrong in Solomon's reign, his own prayer creating the grid for identifying his failings (cf. Firth 2019, pp. 139-140). As Wray Beal (2014, p. 132) points out, Solomon does not live up to the rhetoric of his prayer. Nevertheless, it is important to note

that just as Hannah's prayer provided a grid for assessing various figures in Samuel, so Solomon's prayer also assesses him and becomes a marker for highlighting weaknesses in his reign.

In contrast, the Naaman story (2 Ki 5) provides a much more positive presentation of a foreigner, even if at points his personal theology might be rather limited. The importance of this story, relative to the prayer, emerges when we observe that although the density of forgiveness language in the prayer might make readers anticipate that this will be a frequent motif across the book, it in fact does not recur until this point. A full treatment of this narrative is beyond our scope here. For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that despite the probable literary complexity of the narrative (cf. Gilmour 2014, pp. 144-146), its narrative unity can still be defended, especially through the *Leitwort* שלום across the proposed divisions (Ngan 1997, p. 589). Naaman also hears about YHWH, in his case via a captured Israelite servant girl, and eventually comes to Elisha seeking healing. When healed, Naaman declares to Elisha that he now knows there is 'no God in all the earth but Israel' (2 Ki 5:15). There is no indication of prayer in the narrative, but he is now a foreigner who has achieved the knowledge anticipated in Solomon's prayer, and his desire to take some earth from Israel clearly indicates a desire to pray to YHWH, whatever the political implications of his position in Aram. Indeed, Naaman specifically asks for forgiveness [סליח] for the fact that he must worship in Rimmon's temple.

Naaman's forgiveness contrasts with the impossibility of Manasseh receiving forgiveness (2 Ki 25:3-4), as in his case there was no forgiveness. Naaman and Manasseh thus stand in contrast to one another, with the possibility of forgiveness marked out for both in terms of Solomon's prayer. For Naaman, coming to understand YHWH's identity leads to the possibility of forgiveness of cultic irregularity because of his specific circumstances. In contrast, because Manasseh had committed himself to irregular cultic practices, which also led to widespread violence (2 Ki 21:16) and led Judah to sin, there is no forgiveness. Solomon's prayer has outlined the context and means by which both Naaman and Manasseh might receive forgiveness, but only Naaman receives it. Even for Solomon himself, the prayer creates the literary context for demonstrating that even what might have seemed like a significant success in his encounter with the Queen of Sheba was really sowing the seeds for his final failure.

■ Conclusion

Prayer within the Former Prophets is not restricted to the prayers considered here, and the overall picture could be nuanced by considering some of the other prayers. Nevertheless, the three considered serve well to highlight the key themes around prayer that emerge in Samuel-Kings while also

recognising the clear distinction that is found when comparing this material with Joshua–Judges. The relative paucity of material on prayer there needs to be considered in its own terms while also noting that (though limited) a positive portrayal of prayer is present even there. But it is in Samuel–Kings that we encounter a much more developed theology of prayer, one that is explored here through consideration of the pivotal prayers of Hannah, David and Solomon.

Within these three prayers, we may note that they have a gradual progression in their relative formality. Hannah's prayer is presented as a token of thanksgiving, offered by a woman who, though perhaps from a comparatively wealthy family, has no obvious social standing. It is a private prayer, offered in the temple at Shiloh. David's prayer is offered as king and appears to be a public prayer, at least in the sense that his act of praying before others is something to be observed. Solomon's is the most formal prayer, a clearly public and carefully structured liturgical act where his status as king is particularly prominent. These prayers are thus presented as coming from different social positions. Despite this, the presentation of each of these prayers also establishes a context for our reading of the balance of the book in which we find it, and in the case of David's prayer especially, the balance of the book of Kings too. That is, the placement of these prayers at such prominent points in the narrative is a device used by the narrators of Samuel–Kings to use these prayers as a focal point for guiding readers in how to understand and assess the events that follow, even if these prayers might also critique those who had offered them. The echoes established for these prayers also means that through them the narrative sets out key themes that will follow, meaning that these prayers are not only a report of what a character said, they are also words that shape their world. For Samuel–Kings at least, prayer shapes the world around it.

Prayer in the Major Prophets

Jaap Dekker

Department of Old Testament,
Theological University Kampen | Utrecht,
Utrecht, the Netherlands

■ Introduction

When it comes to prayer in the Major Prophets, Jeremiah is usually the most in focus. He is even known as the prophet of prayer *par excellence* (Balentine 1981, p. 331). While this is understandable in light of his personal struggles with God, the book of Isaiah also carries important perspectives for a Biblical Theology of prayer. However, attention must then be focused more on the book than on the person of Isaiah because little insight is given into his prayer life. The book itself, however, contains several prayer texts that presuppose a setting of worship or provide important prompts for it. Moreover, a Biblical Theology of prayer should rely on the written tradition of the prophets anyway because texts are the only sources available today. The same is true of Jeremiah (Widmer 2015, p. 334). This chapter, therefore, does not aim to provide a reconstruction of prayer in the lives of the prophets themselves but rather the theology of prayer in the authoritative prophetic tradition preserved in writing.

The focus of this chapter will be on the books of both Isaiah and Jeremiah. Certainly, the book of Ezekiel also contains references to prayer (Ezk 4:14; 9:8; 11:13; 21:5). Moreover, the complaints quoted from the people

How to cite: Dekker, J 2023, 'Prayer in the Major Prophets', in AJ Coetsee & FP Viljoen (eds.), *Biblical Theology of prayer in the Old Testament*, Reformed Theology in Africa Series, vol. 12, AOSIS Books, Cape Town, pp. 43–62. <https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2023.BK417.03>

could have been prayers in origin as well (Ezk 18:25, 29; 33:10, 17, 20; 37:11), while some of them may have become proverbs (Ezk 12:22; 18:2). Usually, only explicit and intentional communication with God is qualified as prayer (Balentine 1993, pp. 30–32). Nevertheless, a complaint lacking a direct address may be intended as an indirect prayer. The same is true of hymns that speak of God in the third person out of awe and in order to avoid too much familiarity (Korpel 2009, p. 118). It is therefore important not to define prayer too narrowly. Even then, however, the book of Ezekiel is not stamped by prayer. It rather gives expression to YHWH's disappointment that his city lacks intercessors (Ezk 22:30; cf. Ezk 13:5). For this reason and because of space available, Ezekiel will not be considered separately but will be referred to only when it makes sense for comparison.

First, an overview will be given of the occurrence of prayer in Isaiah and Jeremiah. Then, three representative prayers from each of them will be discussed. This does not involve detailed exegesis, for the aim is to examine the theology expressed in prayer. Selected from Isaiah are the thanksgiving prayer of Isaiah 38:10–20, the supplication of Isaiah 51:9–11 and the prayer of lament and penitence of Isaiah 63:7–64:11. The selection from Jeremiah consists of the penitential prayers of Jeremiah 14:7–9 and 19–22 (taken together) and the laments of Jeremiah 20:7–18 and Jeremiah 32:17–25, the latter of which is embedded in a narrative. In conclusion, some theological reflections will follow to bring into focus the prayer perspectives of the Major Prophets and to describe their contribution to a Biblical Theology of prayer.

■ Prayer in the book of Isaiah

The book of Isaiah makes only limited mention of prayers allegedly uttered by the prophet. The prophet himself plays a role in a few narrative sections. In his temple vision, Isaiah enters into conversation with God. While his complaint 'Woe is me! I am lost [...]' (Is 6:5) functions as an indirect prayer, his question 'How long, o LORD?' (Is 6:11a) is characteristic of a lament (cf. Ps 80:5). Remarkably, the story of Isaiah's encounter with King Ahaz in the context of the Syro-Ephraimite War does not contain any intercession on behalf of the king or the people of Judah. Ahaz does not ask for it any more than he wants to ask for a sign (Is 7:12), nor does Isaiah himself take the initiative to intercede. In a similar story about King Hezekiah at the time of the Assyrian crisis, things are different. Then, Hezekiah has his envoys ask Isaiah to pray for the remnant of the people (Is 37:1–4). According to the narrative, however, Isaiah immediately delivers a salvation oracle. The narrative leaves open the question of whether Isaiah has actually interceded first, as the reference to Zion's deliverance 'through the hand of Isaiah' after prayer in Sirach 48:20 presupposes, or whether he had already received a message from God directly. The latter also happens when Hezekiah himself

prays to God after having received a threatening letter (Is 37:21–35). The lament of Hezekiah, however, is explicitly recorded (Is 37:15–20; cf. 2 Ki 19:15–19). After a hymnal passage, Hezekiah asks God to listen, complains about the mocking Assyrians and finally pleads for salvation in order that all kingdoms may know that YHWH is the only one. The book also contains two prayers uttered by Hezekiah because of his sudden illness: a short supplication prayer (Is 38:3; cf. 2 Ki 20:3) and a prayer of thanksgiving (Is 38:10–20) that has no parallel in 2 Kings.

Outside of these narrative portions, only Isaiah 2:6–9 describes a lament in which the prophet directly addresses God. In the context of the chapter, it functions as an indictment of the house of Jacob, followed by an announcement of judgement (Is 2:10–22). The indictment is framed by two clauses that address God in prayer: ‘Indeed, you have forsaken your people, the house of Jacob’ (Is 2:6a), ‘do not forgive them’ (Is 2:9b). Initially, the prophet seems to be taking on the role of intercessor, but Verse 9b makes it clear that he is not aiming for this. Whether the phrase is original or not (it is missing in 1QIsa^a), it makes clear the fact that the lament does not function as an accusation against God but against the people. Isaiah apparently does not want the people to get away with their idolatrous practices. This does not mean that he is unfeeling regarding the people’s fate. In his report of the temple vision Isaiah shows solidarity with the sinful people (Is 6:5) and asks about the term of his commission to harden them (Is 6:11a). Elsewhere, he laments the destruction of his people (Is 22:4), in a way comparable to Jeremiah. From later times, there is another prophetic lament in Isaiah 24:16aβ.b, which echoes Isaiah 6:5 and relates to God’s judgement on all the earth’s inhabitants.

A recurring accusation against the people in Isaiah 1–39 is that they do not consult the Holy One of Israel (Is 9:12; 22:11; 31:1; cf. Is 8:19) or that their praying is futile because of their blood-stained hands (Is 1:15) and their prayers are just lip service (Is 29:13). This is in contrast to the Egyptians whose future prayers in distress will be heard by YHWH (Is 19:20–22). Only Isaiah 26:7–19 and 33:2–9 describe extensive prayers for restoration of justice and peace, respectively, for favour and salvation in times of trouble. They arise from a real desire to acknowledge YHWH alone and are motivated by confidence and explicit praise. It is the righteous portion of the people (cf. Is 26:2), those who regard the fear of YHWH as Zion’s treasure (Is 33:6), who express themselves in them while explicitly distinguishing themselves from the wicked (Is 26:10).

The first part of the book also contains a number of hymns and prayers of thanksgiving that indicate that those who have survived God’s judgement will again pray and utter thanksgiving. On an editorial level, these hymns have a liturgical function for the readers of the book. The first thanksgiving

prayer (Is 12:1-6) can be understood as an anticipatory thanksgiving in which Isaiah identifies himself profoundly with the people of Israel and addresses the book's readership in order to give them hope and to invite them to share his thanksgiving (Beuken 2004). Chapters 24-27 are even interspersed with hymns which will be sung in the future (Is 25:1-5, 9; 26:1-6; cf. Is 24:14-16). A unique feature of the song of Isaiah 27:3-6 is that it is sung by YHWH himself, at the same time inviting listeners and readers to sing along.

The second part of the book, Isaiah 40-55, confirms that Israel grossly failed to call upon YHWH (Is 43:22). Some of their complaints may be understood as indirect prayers (Is 40:27), but they appeared to mostly address their homemade idols (Is 44:17). This perplexes YHWH (Is 45:20), for why pray to a god who does not save? In the future, however, other peoples will address YHWH as the God of Israel, the Saviour (Is 45:15). Meanwhile, the invitation to call upon YHWH remains for all those who want to return (Is 55:6-7). A specific group among the exiles, those who pursue righteousness and have YHWH's teaching in their hearts (Is 51:1, 7), actually call upon YHWH (Is 51:9-11) and experience their prayers being answered (Is 51:12-16). In bringing about the change, the suffering servant seems to play a role. He comes into the picture gradually, starting in Isaiah 48:16b (cf. Is 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12), has interceded for transgressors (Is 53:12) and received the promise that he will see his offspring (Is 53:10), which refers to the servants of YHWH who, after the servant's death, come to the fore. The salvation oracles that comprise Isaiah 40-55 are interspersed with hymns of praise (Is 42:10-12; 44:23; 49:13; 52:9-10) that have a structural and again also a liturgical function (Korpel 2009, pp. 129-130).

YHWH's own announcement that his temple will be a house of prayer for all peoples (Is 56:7) is the first mention of prayer in the book's third part, Isaiah 56-66. Nevertheless, Israel itself does not yet appear to live up to this vision. Actually, they do pray, but just as in Isaiah 1:15, the futility of their prayers is mentioned. Their fasting and seeking YHWH is accompanied by such injustice that they should not count on being heard on high (Is 58:2-4; 59:1-3; cf. Is 1:15; Ezk 8:18). The seriousness of the situation is poignantly expressed in the lament of Isaiah 59:9-15a, which explicitly confesses the people's iniquities. In Isaiah 62:6-7, a prophet claims that he has appointed sentinels on Jerusalem's walls who must continue to pray until YHWH has completely realised Jerusalem's restoration (Tiemeyer 2005, pp. 398-399 regards YHWH as the one who appointed the sentinels). Resigning to the current deplorable situation is not an option.

The prayer of lament and penitence in Isaiah 63:7-64:11 is the most extensive prayer to be found in this part of the book. In Isaiah 58:9, YHWH had already promised that if his people showed acts of righteousness, he would be ready to answer when they cried for help. The present editorial

composition assumes that Chapters 65–66 are in fact God’s response. YHWH explicitly confirms that he has been waiting all day long and is still willing to be found by those who were not looking for him (Is 65:1–2). However, YHWH now declares to make clear distinctions among his people. He announces judgement for those whose idolatrous practices have actually demonstrated that they prefer to keep him at a distance (Is 65:5), but he promises salvation to those who have sought him (Is 65:8–10). The theophany prayed for (Is 63:19b–64:2) will come but will involve judgement not only on Israel’s adversaries but also on God’s enemies among his own people (Is 66:14b–17). The group, already visible in the prayer of Isaiah 51:9–11, now gains a clear profile. The servants of YHWH will be spared in the judgement (Is 66:14b). As a people blessed by YHWH, they may live on a new earth. All beings made of flesh shall come and worship before him (Is 66:23), making worship ‘the summit of Mount Isaiah’ (Abernethy 2021, p. 165). Included in the blessing is the fact that YHWH promises to answer them before their praying to him (Is 65:24).

■ Prayer in the book of Jeremiah

In its description of the actual prayer life of Israel, the book of Jeremiah corresponds more or less to Isaiah. YHWH complains that his people detached themselves from him (Jr 2:31), worshipped self-made idols (Jr 2:27) and have even inquired of the sun, the moon, and all the host of Heaven (Jr 8:2) instead of YHWH (Jr 10:21). Yet, in an emergency they expect him to bring salvation (Jr 2:27). In doing so, they even invoke their time-honoured relationship with YHWH (Jr 3:4; cf. Jr 3:19) and his character to not remain wrathful forever (Jr 3:5; cf. Ps 103:9). YHWH, however, accuses them of continuing to do evil while he longs for them to utter a sincere penitential prayer (Jr 3:13, 22b–25).

However, most of the book’s prayers are not from the people but prayers in which Jeremiah himself addresses God. In contrast to the book of Isaiah, there are only a few prayer sections that can be defined as a hymnal (Jr 10:6–10; 16:19; 32:17–22). More characteristic features of the book are Jeremiah’s intercession prayers for Israel, his laments about Israel’s sins and destiny, and the prayers in which he complains of his own sufferings. The traditional qualification ‘confessions’ does not cover the scope, because they are primarily prayers of lament (Balentine 1981, p. 334, 1993, pp. 152–153; and others). Jeremiah does not mince words when he intercedes for Israel. Balentine (1993, p. 146) illustrates this tellingly with a quote from King Lear: ‘Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say’ (cf. Miller 1994, p. 133). The book’s first intercessory prayer immediately sets the tone, as Jeremiah complains that YHWH has deceived his people by promising peace when the sword is now at the throat (Jr 4:10). At the same time, the prophet does see the problem and extensively laments the infidelity and

stubbornness present in all layers of the population (Jr 5:3–6). He even identifies with God to such an extent that he admits to being full of God's wrath and is weary of holding it in (Jr 6:10–11a). However, because he simultaneously identifies with the people, Jeremiah continues to intercede for them, even though YHWH repeatedly forbids him to do so (Jr 7:16; 11:14; 14:11–12). In this, Jeremiah is very much like Moses, 'the father of biblical prayer' (Widmer 2015, p. 10), who also did not let God stop him from continuing his intercession (Ex 32:9–13; cf. Dt 9:14) (Widmer 2015, p. 338).

God's judgement on Israel makes even Jeremiah sick (Jr 8:18–23; cf. Baruch in Jr 45:3). Identifying himself with Israel, the prophet acknowledges that the people deserve God's disciplining (Jr 10:23–25; cf. Jr 11:5b). At the same time, however, he asks God to keep measure and direct his wrath to the nations that do not know him. The prophet utters a penitential prayer on behalf of the people (Jr 14:7–9), but even when he cites a mitigating circumstance – the fact that their prophets have proclaimed salvation (Jr 14:13) – God's answer is inexorable. YHWH is as persistent in his rejection of Jeremiah's prayers – he would not listen to even Moses and Samuel in this case (Jr 15:1) – as Jeremiah is in continuing to pray (Jr 14:19–22; cf. Lk 18:1–8) (Balentine 1993, pp. 161–162). However, the lament of Jeremiah 14:17–18, which YHWH explicitly commands Jeremiah to express, indicates that YHWH himself also grieves for his people. Jeremiah's laments, in fact, incarnate God's pain as well (Widmer 2015, p. 373). The last references to Jeremiah's intercession activity are in Jeremiah 37:3 and 42:2–4, 9, 20. After the destruction of Jerusalem, he intercedes at the request of the Judean survivors in Jerusalem, but the content of his prayers is not explicitly described anymore. In any case, after the fulfilment of his judgement, YHWH is no longer dismissive of Jeremiah's intercession, although the Judean survivors do not subsequently respond to God as desired.

Jeremiah's prayers also increasingly relate to his personal sufferings. Some see these personal prayers as arising from Jeremiah's identification with Israel's fate. However, although they are closely related (Goldingay 2009, p. 287), the kinship with individual lament psalms points to the personal character of his suffering (Balentine 1981, pp. 334–335). Initially, Jeremiah relates to his young age (Jr 1:6), which as a rhetorical device might refer to his powerlessness rather than to his real age (Strawn 2005). However, there is no escape from the task to which God has called him. The opposition and even murderous plans he faces cause Jeremiah to ask God to take revenge on his enemies (Jr 11:20). He calls God to account for the prosperity of evildoers and the damage they cause with their wickedness (Jr 12:1–4). He passionately begs YHWH to stand up for him, but at the same time he feels so disappointed that he compares YHWH to a deceitful brook (Jr 15:15–18). YHWH rebukes him for this and repeats his promise of divine protection (Jr 15:19–21; cf. Jr 1:8, 18–19). Nevertheless, Jeremiah

continues to complain that YHWH is in danger of becoming a terror to him and again prays for the destruction of his persecutors (Jr 17:13–18), a request he elaborates with striking images (Jr 18:19–23). The prayers with regard to Jeremiah's own sufferings reach their climax in the prophet boldly accusing YHWH of having seduced him and cursing the day of his birth (Jr 20:7–18).

The final prayer in which the prophet complains to God about Israel's downfall is in the context of Jerusalem's siege and the order God gave him to buy a field (Jr 32:16–25). This prayer is part of a section known as the book of Comfort because it announces the restoration of Israel (Jr 31–33). The liturgical character of the prayer explains the comprehensiveness of the hymnal passage (Jr 32:17–22) and the explicit recognition of Israel's guilt (Jr 32:23). This fits with Ephraim's penitential prayer, of which God says that he is now willing to listen to it (Jr 31:18–20; cf. Jr 33:3). The situation has clearly changed, as Jeremiah had foreseen in his letter to the exiles in Babylon. After 70 years, a time will come when they will again seek YHWH with all their heart and he will listen to them (Jr 29:12–14; cf. Jr 50:4–5). To prepare for this new future, the prophet advises the exiles to pray for the city to which God has taken them (Jr 29:7). However, that will not prevent the ultimate downfall of Babylon (cf. Jr 50–51), as Seraiah is explicitly ordered to confirm in his prayer after being sent to the city to read Jeremiah's judgement oracles (Jr 51:62).

■ Selected prayers from Isaiah

The prayers discussed in this and in the next section will not be interpreted in detail but will be examined for the theology expressed in them. With regard to the book of Isaiah, a prayer has been selected from each of its three major parts, each with a distinct character. The thanksgiving prayer of Isaiah 38:10–20 is selected because it has no parallel in 2 Kings. The supplication of Isaiah 51:9–11 will be discussed because it is the only prayer in Chapters 40–55 and indicates the presence of a God-seeking group among the exiles. And finally, the prayer of lament and penitence of Isaiah 63:7–64:11 was chosen for its significant size and special theological content.

■ Isaiah 38:10–20

The prayer of thanksgiving in Isaiah 38:10–20 has its own heading in Verse 9. This may indicate that it first existed separately as a written thanksgiving prayer and was already connected to King Hezekiah (Barré 2005, p. 49). Published pious prayers of kings are also known from Mesopotamia (Hallo 1976; Miller 1994, pp. 200–201). However, Hezekiah's prayer is now fully embedded in the narrative of his illness and healing. It differs in character from the short lament that the king utters from his distress, in which he

appeals to his own David-like piety (Is 38:3). As a result of its narrative setting, however, the thanksgiving prayer also functions to emphasise Hezekiah's piety and to make him contrast all the more with King Ahaz (cf. Is 7:12). Hezekiah's thanksgiving even precedes his healing as befits a pious king.

The prayer does not open with an address and praise but rather immediately begins with the lament that Hezekiah had expressed in his anguish. It vividly describes the emergency from which YHWH delivered him and primarily addressed a supposed audience. The prayer looks like a public testimony, such as is often promised to God in prayers for help (e.g. Ps 106:47). The testimony character is evident in the hymnal part of the prayer that mentions a father making God's faithfulness known to his children (Is 38:19; cf. Ps 71:18) and concludes with an exhortation to sing with stringed instruments for YHWH in his temple all days (Is 38:20). The focus on praise in the temple matches with the core of Hezekiah's lament, that he would not see YHWH in the land of the living (Is 38:11). He complains that he must die in the noontide of his days (Is 38:10), which would make him share the fate of the wicked (cf. Ps 55:23–24). His deepest sorrow, however, appears to be the definitive break in communion with God that comes along with it. No longer being able to see YHWH means no longer participating in the liturgy (cf. Ps 27:4, 13; 42:3). The motif of the dead who will not praise YHWH (Is 38:18; cf. Ps 6:6; 88:11) elsewhere functions as an argument that God is harming himself by allowing a pious king to die. In the context of praise, however, it expresses Hezekiah's desire to continue communion with God in the liturgy (cf. Is 38:22).

Hezekiah addresses God as Adonai (Is 38:14, 16), setting himself up as God's servant. He only uses the covenant name YHWH in his public testimony (Is 38:11, 20; cf. Is 38:3). In the lament of which the thanksgiving prayer initially reports, Hezekiah holds God responsible for his impending premature death, using metaphors that show great boldness in arguing with God. YHWH cuts him off from the loom and, like a lion, breaks all his bones (Is 38:12–13). This fits the narrative that gives no reason for God's decision to end Hezekiah's life. Admittedly, Hezekiah thanks God for having cast all his sins behind his back (Is 38:17), but this presupposes the general belief that illness and sin are somehow related more strongly than that it refers to concrete sin that had caused his illness. The fact that Hezekiah holds God responsible for his untimely death does not prevent him, however, from asking the same God to be his surety (Is 38:14; cf. Gn 43:9; 44:32). He does not ask for strength to accept his fate or for peace in his heart but aims for God to change his mind. The thanksgiving prayer testifies that Hezekiah has been successful in it (Is 38:15). From the

one who brings him to an end, God has changed to the one who held back his life from the pit (Is 38:17). This leads him to emphasise God's faithfulness as his praiseworthy attribute (Is 38:18, 19). The personal experience of Hezekiah resembles Israel's collective experiences during the Assyrian crisis, in which YHWH granted Jerusalem a last-minute escape (701 BCE). Later readers, who had experienced the return from exile already, may even have recognised the pattern of their most recent history in Hezekiah's prayer of thanksgiving (cf. Beuken 2010, p. 419).

■ Isaiah 51:9–11

Isaiah 40–55 contains only one explicit prayer (Is 51:9–11). It is a supplication of those exiles that are willing to seek YHWH (Is 51:1, 7), in distinction to the people as a whole (Berges 2015, p. 148). They hope for divine intervention.

The supplication is a wake-up call to the arm of YHWH and urgently appeals to its renowned strength as it manifested itself during the exodus. These days of old are explicitly recalled by addressing YHWH as the one who cuts Rahab into pieces and pierces Tannin, and as the one who dries up the sea and makes a pathway for the redeemed to cross over (Is 51:9–10). The use of mythological language that recalls YHWH's primeval defeat of the forces of anti-creation echoes his self-presentation as a warrior (Is 40:10; 42:13; cf. Is 52:10; 59:17; 63:12) and his repeated claims to his divine capacity to dry up rivers and seas (Is 42:15; 44:27; 50:2). The exiles express their deep-seated fear that they are at the mercy of these threatening forces again, but by using participles they also express their hope, because achieving victory over mythical sea monsters still characterises YHWH (Dekker 2017). The reference to the exodus and to the Sea of Reeds experience appears to be current in communal laments (Ps 74:13–15; 89:11; cf. Is 63:11–14). Verse 11 should be translated as continuing the prayer (Dekker 2017, p. 33), in distinction to Isaiah 35:10, whose phrasing is almost similar (Berges 2015, pp. 143, 156). It gives substance to the purpose of the supplication, which would otherwise be missing. The exiles plead for their return as the ransomed of YHWH, in order to enter Zion with eternal joy on their heads. The flipside will be that sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Characteristic of the supplication of Isaiah 51:9–11 is its impressive actualisation of Israel's salvation history, echoing promises YHWH has given in a series of salvation oracles, and its powerful appeal to YHWH's own reputation from days of old. The fact that the supplication immediately receives a message of comfort in response (Is 51:12–16), moreover reveals that they actually struck the right chord with YHWH. He emphatically affirms his reputation to which the exiles appealed and proclaims to be the one who stills the sea (Dekker 2018).

■ Isaiah 63:7–64:11

In terms of genre and content, the extensive prayer of Isaiah 63:7–64:11 makes a composite impression but clearly functions as a textual unit.¹⁷ It can be characterised as a prayer of lament and penitence consisting of two major parts, Isaiah 63:7–14 and 63:15–64:11,¹⁸ which both move from first-person singular to first-person plural, though in the first part only initially (Is 63:7aβ; cf. Masoretic Text [MT] Is 63:14aβ). A prophetic ‘I’ identifies himself with the people as a whole in a similar way as Moses did as intercessor for Israel. YHWH is addressed directly only in the second part of the prayer, though Isaiah 63:14b already prepares for it.

Isaiah 63:7–14 consists of two segments that both build on past experiences. It starts with praise and recounts YHWH’s acts of deliverance (cf. Ps 77:12; 89:2) while also mentioning the rebellion of his children and YHWH’s punishment thereof (Is 63:8–11a). Then a lament follows probing YHWH for his presence now and concluding with a confessional statement that actually functions as an argument to reinforce the lament (Is 63:11b–14). Isaiah 63:15–64:11 continues the lament but now focuses on the present and directly appeals to YHWH. Three interrelated segments can be distinguished, of which the first stands out because of its supplication for a real theophany from Heaven, appealing to YHWH’s fatherhood. Meanwhile, it makes a bold reproach that holds YHWH himself responsible for the straying of his people because he has hardened their hearts (Is 63:15–64:2). The second segment appeals to God’s reputation as helper of those who wait for him, in order that he would be receptive to a now explicit confession of guilt which is not free from the reproach that YHWH himself caused them to sin as a result of his anger (Is 64:3–6) (Gärtner 2006, pp. 149–150). The third segment repeats the argument that YHWH is their father, though now primarily linked with creation instead of redemption, and harks back to God’s own previous statement that they are his people (Is 64:7–11; cf. Is 63:8). The first and third segments also agree in mentioning the destruction wrought in Zion and in the holy temple as a motive for the lament (Is 63:18; 64:9–10).

As a prayer of lament and penitence, Isaiah 63:7–64:11 has a unique character. It is a post-exilic composition in which an originally exilic lament has been incorporated. The prayer presupposes familiarity with Isaianic theology. It bears a resemblance to traditional communal laments and has often been characterised as such (Aejmelaeus 1995; Fischer 1989) but has also been compared to post-exilic penitential prayers (Williamson 1990, pp. 56–57).

17. Going back to a Christian tradition that related Isaiah 63:19b–4:2 to the coming of Christ, many translations number Isaiah 63:19b–64:11 as Isaiah 64:1–12 (Dekker 2020, p. 254).

18. IQIsa^a and LXX have a paragraph marker after v. 14 (Dekker 2020, p. 253).

Characteristically, however, even its confession of guilt is phrased as lament. Because of his anger, YHWH seems to be held co-responsible for his people's sinfulness (Blenkinsopp 2003, p. 257), although they express the latter with unprecedented poignant metaphors (Is 64:5).

The prayer, like that of Isaiah 51:9-11, derives its main argument from the reputation of YHWH. An important historical pleading ground is the relationship between YHWH and his people (Is 63:8, 16; 64:7-8), which goes back to the exodus and has existed for a long time (Is 63:8-11a). The Reed Sea experience and the divine guidance during the desert period are now being recalled in particular (Is 63:11b-14). A closely related theological pleading is the twice-mentioned divine purpose of the exodus, that YHWH would make for himself an everlasting and glorious name (Is 63:12, 14; cf. Is 64:1). Meanwhile, the phrasing and imagery used in the recapitulation of history show a double literary reference. They refer both to the exodus tradition and to the experience of judgement and exile mentioned earlier in the book of Isaiah (Klein 2021).¹⁹ This ambiguity expresses the hope that YHWH will again actualise his gracious deeds. In the second part of the prayer, the focus of the argument is more on the people's sinful condition and on the destruction of the temple, two facts that seem to question the long-existing relationship (Is 63:19a).

Meanwhile, many attributes and positive characteristics of YHWH are mentioned in the prayer:

- his mercy and graciousness (Is 63:7b)
- his reputation as Saviour (Is 63:8)
- his love and pity (Is 63:9)
- his zeal and might (Is 63:15)
- his passion and compassion (Is 63:15)
- his name as Father and Potter of Israel (Is 63:16; 64:7), as Redeemer from of old (Is 63:16)
- his fame as being the only one who helps those who wait for him (Is 64:3) and meets those who gladly do right (Is 64:4).

They all function as theological pleading grounds. His anger, however, is also mentioned twice (Is 64:4, 8), and the disturbing experience that, as a consequence of the people's grieving his holy spirit, YHWH has turned into an enemy (cf. Is 1:24; Lm 2:4-5), fighting against his own people (Is 63:10), hardening their hearts (Is 63:17), hiding his face from them, delivering them

19. According to Klein, this regards the identification of Israel as God's children (Is 1:2), the characterisation of YHWH as Saviour and Redeemer (key divine attributes in Is 40-66), the metaphor of YHWH bearing his people (Is 40:11; 46:3-4), Israel's rebellious behaviour (Is 1:20), the metaphor of shepherds (Is 44:28), the divine arm of YHWH (Is 51:9), his making a name (Is 55:13), the leading through the depths (Is 51:10), the rest motif (Is 14:3), and the motif of YHWH's leading (Is 49:10).

to their own iniquities (Is 64:6) and punishing them while keeping silent (Is 64:11). At first glance, these negative representations of God may be perceived as opposed to his positive attributes. They do not point, however, to an ambiguity in YHWH but rather to the fact that he acts according to his relationship with them (Dekker 2020, p. 369). The first segment of the prayer is not coincidentally full of allusions to the covenant. The negative representations of God demonstrate, above all, the potential of prayer as a legitimate attempt within the context of a covenant to change God's mind.

In contrast to the supplication of Isaiah 51:9–11, it appears that the prayer of Isaiah 63:7–64:11 has not struck the right chord with YHWH in all respects. A divine answer does follow, but it is not a salvation oracle. YHWH declares that he will indeed not keep silent but will repay their iniquities and those of their ancestors (Is 65:6–7) (Gärtner 2006, pp. 151–152). However, he will not destroy them all but will spare his servants, making them the inheritors of his mountains (Is 65:8). In fact, YHWH announces a great separation between his servants and his enemies (Is 66:14b), those among his own people who have rebelled against him (Is 66:24; cf. Is 65:11–12).

■ Selected prayers from Jeremiah

This section will examine three prayers from the book of Jeremiah with respect to their theology. Because of the many prayers in the book, it is more complex than with Isaiah to make a representative selection. The choice for the penitential prayers of Jeremiah 14:7–9 and 19–22 (taken together) and the laments of Jeremiah 20:7–18 and 32:17–25 is made to include Jeremiah's role as intercessor for Israel, his personal struggle with God and the changed context that the capture of Jerusalem brought.

■ Jeremiah 14:7–9, 19–22

In Jeremiah 3:13, 22–25, YHWH looks forward to a sincere penitential prayer from his rebellious people. Chapter 14 even contains two of them, preceded by laments (Jr 14:2–6, 17–18). The prayers are part of an editorial unity (Jr 14:2–15:9 or 14:21–15:21), and do not necessarily presuppose the liturgical context of a day of fast (Oosterhoff 1994, p. 92). Given YHWH's reaction that prohibits Jeremiah's intercession, it is unlikely that the prayers are collective prayers of the people (Widmer 2015, p. 365). They are from Jeremiah himself, who identifies with Israel and intercedes for them. In the context of a drought with major consequences for humans as well as wild animals, YHWH is asked to intervene for the sake of his own name (Jr 14:7, 21), which stands for his reputation as Israel's Saviour (cf. Jos 7:9; 9:9; Is 63:12, 14) and as a merciful God (cf. Ex 33:19; 34:6–7). It is a familiar argument in the Old Testament (OT) prayer (e.g. Ps 109:21) and aims to

convince YHWH not to make his intervention dependent on the behaviour of the people. Both prayers confess unequivocally that present Israel, together with its ancestors, is guilty of iniquities: 'we have sinned against you' (Jr 14:7, 20). As the implication of his covenant name, YHWH is addressed as Israel's hope (cf. Jr 17:13; 50:7)²⁰ and saviour in times of trouble (Jr 14:8).

The first prayer implicitly alludes to the covenant by appealing to God's presence and to the fact that the name of YHWH has been proclaimed over them (Jr 14:9; *inclusio* with 14:7, Miller 1994, p. 125). The second prayer even mentions the covenant explicitly (Jr 14:21). According to McKane (1986, p. 334) and Widmer (2015, pp. 379–380), this alludes to the Davidic Covenant. In his preaching, however, Jeremiah generally appeals to the Sinai Covenant (cf. Jr 11:1–14). The mention of God's throne refers to the sanctuary (Jr 17:12) that houses the Ark of the Sinai Covenant (Jr 3:16) as well as to Zion/Jerusalem (Jr 3:17) where YHWH exercises his kingship (Jr 8:19). Jeremiah does not lament the dishonouring of David's throne here, though he is acquainted with the concept (e.g. Jr 13:13; 17:25; etc.). It does not fit into the covenant reality that God would forsake his people and break the covenant. With comparisons that the Targum considered too bold (McKane 1986, p. 321), YHWH is, therefore, asked why he is acting like a stranger, like a traveller who stays a night only, like someone confused and like a warrior not able to help (Jr 14:8–9). The second prayer even asks YHWH point-blank if he has completely rejected Judah and loathes Zion (Jr 14:19). The latter would, in fact, mean dishonouring his glorious throne (Jr 14:21; cf. Jr 17:12). It is inherent to the covenant that YHWH might punish his people, but not to the point that there would be no more healing or prospect of peace. However, such is the lament in the second and more desperate prayer (Oosterhoff 1994, p. 105). The call upon YHWH to remember even lacks an object that could be invoked, which is unusual (Fischer 2005, p. 488). The prayer culminates in the confession that only YHWH can bring rain. Neither the gods of other nations nor Heaven itself can do so. For that reason, despite the disappointments hitherto, hope is still definitely set on YHWH (Jr 14:22).

Although both of these penitential prayers seem to be impeccable, YHWH still explicitly rejects them. He will not accept intercession but will remember his people's iniquity and consume them by the sword, by famine and by pestilence (Jr 14:10, 11–16; 15:1–9). YHWH even repeatedly forbids Jeremiah to pray for the people any longer. Jeremiah just does not seem to want to resign himself to that.

20. The title is unique for Jeremiah (Fischer 2005, p. 477). Hecke (2003, pp. 71–73) suggests the translation 'Well of Israel', because 'Hope' would presuppose a Late Biblical Hebrew meaning of the homonymous noun used here. The verbal stem, however, occurs with the unambiguous meaning 'to hope' in the immediate context (see Jr 14:19, 22; cf. Jr 13:16).

■ Jeremiah 20:7-18

Jeremiah's wrestling with his personal sufferings comes to a climax in Jeremiah 20:7-18. Despite being rebuked by God (Jr 15:19), he continues his lament and makes it even more intense. The book's editors situate it in the fitting context of the prophet's arrest by the priest Pashur, who has put him in the stocks (Jr 20:1-2). The lament consists of three parts: in the first, Jeremiah complains strongly about God (Jr 20:7-10); in the second, he asks to be saved from his persecutors (Jr 20:11-13); and in the third, he curses the day on which he was born (Jr 20:14-18).

In retrospect, Jeremiah characterises his calling by YHWH as a case of seduction, according to some even suggesting rape (cf. Ex 22:15; Dt 22:15; 2 Sm 13:14) (Brueggemann 2007, p. 165; McKane 1996, p. 470). He was not in a position to defend himself against YHWH. In fact, this is still true every time he has to deliver YHWH's words. It is so agonising for him that he wants to cry out (Jr 20:8; cf. Jr 6:7): 'Violence and destruction!'. According to some, this refers to his own judgement preaching (Lundbom 1999, p. 856), but it certainly will not be just that. It can also be understood as an ambiguous cry for help. Firstly, because of the mockery, humiliation and traps that Jeremiah faces daily (cf. Jr 11:18-19; 18:18), even from his close friends who try to lure him (Jr 20:10b). However, as he has problems with the way God deals with him, it might also refer to the violence he experiences from YHWH himself. Jeremiah tries to escape the pressure by simply not speaking about YHWH anymore (cf. Jr 6:11), but this appears to be impossible because it then consumes him inside like a fire (cf. Jr 23:9).

At the beginning of the second part of his lament (Jr 20:11-13), Jeremiah expresses his conviction that YHWH is a mighty warrior who will surely overthrow his adversaries. This contradicts Jeremiah's previous lament (Jr 14:9) but is consistent with the promises he had already received from YHWH (Jr 1:8, 18-19; 15:20-21). Promises of divine help, however, do not make prayer superfluous. Therefore, Jeremiah explicitly asks for the fall of his persecutors by appealing to God, who sees the heart and the mind (cf. Jr 11:20). Jeremiah thus submits his sufferings as a trial to the same God whom he has just boldly accused for having overpowered him. In fact, he does not have another address. It is also not the first time that Jeremiah explicitly begs YHWH to take revenge on his enemies (cf. Jr 11:20; 15:15; 17:13-18; 18:19-23). It is debatable whether Verse 13 is an editorial addition, for it calls for the praise of YHWH for saving the life of the needy from evildoers. It is hard to imagine that Jeremiah was in a mood of praise in the context of his poignant lament, but it is not unusual for a supplication to include hymnal elements (e.g. Ps 86:8-13).

The third part of Jeremiah's lament probably originally assumes another occasion (Oosterhoff 1994, p. 218) and consists of an elaborated curse of

the day of his birth (Jr 20:14–18). In typical oriental fashion, he involves the messenger of the birth news in the curse, wishing that he may fare like cities overthrown by YHWH, like Sodom and Gomorrah (Gn 19:25). He even involves his mother by expressing the wish that her womb, in which YHWH himself had known and consecrated him already as a prophet (Jr 1:5), had become his grave (cf. Jr 15:10). Jeremiah could not have put his grief into words more clearly. The intensity of Jeremiah's lament is echoed in Job 3 (Brueggemann 2007, pp. 167–171).

In his lament, Jeremiah addresses God by his covenant name, YHWH, which implies that the lament appeals to the relationship between God and his people. This is not an equal partnership, however. Jeremiah acknowledges this, though he also complains that God is stronger than he is. YHWH uses his power to force him to be his prophet. At the same time, Jeremiah invokes that power by appealing to YHWH's character as a mighty warrior (Jr 20:11). However, the most important characterisation of God in the rhetoric of the prayer is mentioning him, YHWH Zebaoth, who tests the righteous (Jr 20:12). Jeremiah files a lawsuit and expects YHWH to vindicate him as righteous (cf. Ps 17:3–5; Miller 1994, p. 124) by showing divine retribution upon his persecutors according to the *ius talionis*.

■ Jeremiah 32:17–25

The prayer of Jeremiah 32:17–25 is embedded in the narrative of Jeremiah's purchase of a field during the siege of Jerusalem. It gives the impression of a liturgically formulated prayer, comparable with Nehemiah 9:6–37, and is generally regarded as an editorial expansion (Stipp 2019, pp. 301–302). It shows many allusions to the Torah, which probably reveal the theological interests of the book's editors (Balentine 1993, pp. 89–90; Miller 1994, p. 65). This prayer, too, is a lament, as the opening and closing show. Addressing the LORD YHWH, Jeremiah begins with an exclamation of woe (Jr 32:17). At the conclusion, he calls God's attention to the impending assault of the Babylonians, the suffering under sword, famine and pestilence, and the strange God-given command to buy a field (Jr 32:24–25). The central part of the prayer, however, is a hymnal section first describing the creation of Heaven and Earth (cf. 2 Ki 19:15; Is 37:16; Neh 9:6), which YHWH has achieved with his great power and his outstretched arm (cf. Jr 27:5), showing that nothing is too hard for him (Jr 32:17). The latter observation is an important motif rooted in the tradition of the patriarchs (Gn 18:14) that paradigmatically implies that prayers can always be uttered with expectation (Balentine 1993, p. 40).

Jeremiah then dwells more extensively on Israel's experience of the exodus, with special emphasis on the twice-mentioned signs and wonders God has performed. The prophet elaborates on the motif of the strong

hand, outstretched arm and great terror (Jr 32:20–21). Not without reason, he adds that YHWH performs these to this day among Israel and even all mankind. The addition functions as an argument to move God to action, just like the mention of the name YHWH made for himself (cf. Is 63:12, 14; Neh 9:10; Dn 9:15), a motif specifically rooted in the Deuteronomistic tradition (cf. Williamson 1990, pp. 56–57). Jeremiah also mentions the gift of the promised land with its abundance of milk and honey, which contrasts with the circumstances at the time (Jr 32:22). Honestly, he then also acknowledges Israel's disobedience to God's commandments that explains the calamity (Jr 32:32). However, it is also for this reason that Jeremiah had first praised YHWH's faithfulness to thousands, which he gives priority above the mention of God's wrath in punishing the offspring for their parents' guilt (Jr 32:18), in line with Exodus 34:6–7 (cf. Ex 20:5–6; Dt 5:9–10). Jeremiah calls YHWH a God who visits each man in great and mighty acts and judges him righteously (Jr 32:19; cf. Ezk 33:20). In doing so, he has laid a theological floor to strike the right chord with YHWH with his lament about the besieged city and the incomprehensible act of buying he had to perform.

Prayers embedded in narrative settings have the advantage that the outcome is often included (Miller 1994, p. 139). YHWH's answer primarily links with Jeremiah's confession from the beginning of his prayer that for YHWH, as the God of all flesh, nothing is too hard (Jr 32:27). To illustrate this, the recapitulation of God's wrath and of the deserved punishment of Jerusalem's downfall that follows (Jr 32:28–35) introduces the announcement of a return from exile, a renewed covenant and a restored life in the land (Jr 32:36–44). The paradigmatic prayer motif that nothing is impossible for YHWH emphasises God's sovereignty and confirms that OT prayers seek to effect a change in God and are not primarily meant therapeutically (Goldingay 2009, p. 230).

■ Conclusion

It is inherent to the concept of canon that 'whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction', in order to encourage steadfastness and hope (Rm 15:4). This is also true of prayers, even if they are as personal as Jeremiah's. They are instructive, not only with regard to the practice of prayer but with regard to theology as well. What do prayers in the Major Prophets communicate about God when it comes to the characterisation of the addressee, the argumentation put forward and the expression of lament, petition and intercession?

'When a man says piously: "O LORD!" or "Father!" he has spoken a prayer; whether he continues or not, he has said something already' (Blank 1961, p. 79; cf. e.g. Ps 118:5). In short exclamations, the direct address is sometimes

missing (Is 2:6, 9), but most prayers address God by his covenant name 'YHWH' (e.g. Is 38:3; 63:16, 17; Jr 14:7, 9; etc.) or by mentioning him as 'our God' (Jr 14:22), 'Adonai' (Is 38:14, 16) or 'Adonai YHWH' (Jr 32:17; Ezk 4:14; 9:8; 11:13; 21:5), presupposing a covenantal relationship (Jr 14:9, 21). More elaborate addresses, though still shorter than current practice in the polytheistic ancient Near East (Miller 1994, p. 29), aim to express expectations or to set a contrast with actual experiences (Balentine 1981, p. 337). Therefore, God is addressed as the 'Hope of Israel' and 'Saviour in time of trouble' (Jr 14:8; 17:13) or as 'YHWH Zebaoth who tests the righteous and sees hearts and minds' (Jr 20:12). Hope for divine intervention also resonates in the characterisation of God as 'our Father', 'our Redeemer from of old' and 'our Potter' (Is 63:16; 64:7).

Extended addresses function as theological arguments intended to make YHWH willing to answer. His own name should move YHWH to act on behalf of his people (Jr 14:7, 21), for he has a reputation to uphold (Is 63:12, 14; Jr 32:20). Addressing the arm of YHWH, for example, implies hope for its saving power, just as the appeal to the one who defeats the forces of anti-creation and dries up the sea (Is 51:9-10). The Reed Sea experience, in particular, which is the core of Israel's salvation history, is recalled in prayer. Hymnal passages that praise YHWH for his gracious deeds and favour to Israel (Is 63:7), for being a mighty warrior (Jr 20:11), or for showing signs and wonders (Jr 32:20) also intend to move God to care for his reputation and to act again. For the same reason, the prayer of Isaiah 63:7-64:11 recapitulates the exodus tradition in its full breadth, from God's basic commitment to Israel to God's carrying them through the years, including their homecoming from exile in which YHWH had been a Saviour again (Is 63:8-9). As a result of losing contact with Israel's salvation history (Balentine 1993, p. 235), the prayer explicitly asks where the God of the exodus and his zeal and might are today, referring extensively to the passage through the Sea of Reeds and the desert, the pre-eminent events by which YHWH made himself a name (Is 63:11b-15; cf. Jr 32:20). Other prayers include the entry into the promised land in the argument (Jr 32:22-23) and mention YHWH's presence among his people (Jr 14:9) and his glorious throne in Zion (Jr 14:21).

The reputation God has built as Creator of Heaven and Earth, for whom nothing is too hard (Jr 32:17), also functions as pleading ground in prayer. It implies YHWH's prerogative to bring rain (Jr 14:22) as well as his responsibility as a supreme judge to test hearts and minds (Jr 11:20; 20:12) and to consider all the ways of mortals in order to reward them according to their doings (Jr 32:19). The praise of YHWH's faithfulness to thousands, which presupposes a covenantal context (Ex 20:5-6; 34:6-7; Dt 5:9-10), also functions in a creational context (Jr 32:18). It demonstrates YHWH's incomparability in that he acts for those who wait for him and gladly do

right, which, of course, raises expectations (Is 64:3–4; cf. Ezk 4:14). However, it also complicates when those who pray confess their righteous deeds to be like a filthy cloth (Is 64:5).

In itself, the theological argument outlined above is not unique to the Major Prophets. Prayers in narrative texts and psalms also invoke YHWH's name (e.g. Jos 7:9; Ps 79:9; 109:21), his reputation in the history of the exodus (e.g. Jdg 6:13; Ps 77:11–21; 80:9), his power as Creator (e.g. Ps 33:6–9; 89:12–13; 102:26) or his responsibility as supreme judge (e.g. Gn 18:25; 1 Ki 8:59; Ps 7:9–12; 94:1–2). What, then, is it that the Major Prophets contribute to a Biblical Theology of prayer?

Firstly, the reality of God's judgement, which characterises their day and preaching, results in explicit confessions of guilt in their prayers, especially when they intercede for the people (Is 59:12–15; 63:10; 64:4–6; Jr 14:7, 20; 32:23; cf. Is 6:5). Confession of guilt also occurs in the psalms (e.g. Ps 25:11; 32:5; 79:8–9), but the number of true psalms of repentance is relatively limited (e.g. Ps. 51). It is the preaching of the Major Prophets in particular that caused the development of penitential prayer as a genre after the destruction of Jerusalem (Ezk 9; Neh 9; Dn 9; cf. 1 Ki 8:46–50), while priestly traditions (e.g. Lv 26:39–40) may have also contributed to the development of the penitential prayer (Boda 2006).

Secondly, the Major Prophets show that confessions of guilt in prophetic prayer texts in no way diminish the place of lament and complaint in them. Although they were primarily called to proclaim judgement because of Israel's disobedience, the prayers handed down in their books also cling to YHWH's faithfulness to his covenant. It is complained that YHWH withholds his tenderness and compassion (Is 63:15) and does not rule his people anymore as if they were never called by his name (Is 63:19), that he hides his face (Is 64:6), misleads his people (Jr 4:10; cf. Jr 23:13, 32; 29:8) and loathes Zion (Jr 14:19). Jeremiah even uses audacious comparisons for YHWH, of which the stranger, the one-night staying traveller, the confused man and the powerless warrior (Jr 14:8–9) still sound modest. He is rebuked for comparing YHWH to a deceitful brook (Jr 15:18–19) but continues to use firm and accusatory language. Since Westermann, it has often been argued – and regretted – that in exile, penitential prayers took the place of lament and complaint in Israel's prayers (Balentine 2006, pp. 4–6). However, the prayer of Isaiah 63:7–64:11, in particular, shows that lament and complaint could still be made fruitful in the post-exilic period. The development of extensive penitential prayers may well mark a theological shift, but the lament has not been lost (Bautch 2006).

Thirdly, impressed by the devastating consequences of God's judgement, the Major Prophets poignantly articulate the mutual responsibilities within the covenant relationship and the tension that is felt with regard to this.

They protest that YHWH does not act in accordance with his character, reputation and promises. YHWH is asked to turn (Is 63:17) and not to break his covenant (Jr 14:20), calls that were usually addressed to the people. Most intriguing, however, are prayers in which YHWH is held co-responsible, because in his anger he himself has abandoned his people (Is 2:6; 49:14), hardened their hearts and made them continue to sin (Is 63:17; 64:4-6). These are serious accusations that strain the relationship and elicit a firm divine response but also show that the prophets dealt freely with complex theological questions regarding God's righteousness and faithfulness that are not easily answered. The apostle Paul also struggles with these questions in his day (Rm 9-11). The Major Prophets show that the best way to deal with them is through frank prayer.

Fourthly, Jeremiah in particular shows that prayer is not only an appropriate means to express communal needs but also personal feelings toward God and to maintain the dialogue (Balentine 1993, p. 189). Jeremiah's boldness in his struggles with God results from the contradiction he experiences between the promises of divine protection (Jr 1:8, 17-19; 15:20-21) and the threat from his persecutors. Prayer then functions as knocking on the door of the supreme judge and filing a lawsuit. Being the weaker party, Jeremiah asks God to retaliate against his persecutors and to provide him with justice. The way in which he concretises the requested retribution offends many Western Bible readers today, but should not be judged by people living in luxury but from the acute need of an innocent person who is threatened with death (Goldingay 2009, pp. 244-246). These prayers do not arise from personal vindictiveness but from a deep desire for justice where no justice is experienced (Peels 1995, pp. 224-234). Only God can provide for it, and when he does not noticeably do so, prayers of lament are adequate instruments to invoke God against the enemies or even against God himself if necessary. In deep distress, Jeremiah even accuses God of seducing him as a prophet (Jr 20:7). Unlike in Chapter 15, this time he is not rebuked for it, but YHWH does not answer either. That the Scriptures have preserved prayers like these underlines the freedom that apparently exists in communication with God. Especially if God does not answer, lament and complaint remain inevitable and functional (Balentine 1993, p. 163). Such boldness in prayer, in which Jeremiah matches Moses (Widmer 2015, p. 336), always carries some risk, as God and humans are not equals (cf. Koh 5:1b) but need not mark the end of the relationship. It can even make it stronger (Goldingay 2009, p. 229). If circumstances are extreme, so too can prayer be (Goldingay 2009, p. 234). YHWH remains the only one capable of bringing change and redemption (Is 64:3; Jr 20:11-13).

Fifthly, like no other, the Major Prophets show the importance of intercession. Within the covenantal relationship, prophets appear to have been given a special responsibility in making intercession. It is not in all

respects certain whether intercession was standard for the prophetic ministry (Balentine 1984), but it is clear that Moses, Samuel and Jeremiah did see in it part of their calling and that Jeremiah actually expects it from other prophets as well (Jr 23:16–22; cf. Jr 27:18). Even YHWH himself laments when there are no intercessors (Ezk 13:5; 22:30). The fact that YHWH forbids Jeremiah to make intercession is in any case not a usual situation. In itself, such a prohibition could be an implicit invitation to intercede on behalf of the people and to move YHWH to show his mercy (cf. Ex 32:9–13). In view of its repetition, however, the prohibition for Jeremiah also seems to be related to God's decision to execute his judgement. The fact that Jeremiah nevertheless persists in interceding reveals his own commitment to the people (cf. 2 Macc 15:14) and his desire that YHWH's mercy will ultimately triumph over his wrath. In essence, that is also the aim of the prayer of Isaiah 63:7–64:11 in which an intercessor considers it unthinkable that YHWH would remain silent (Is 64:11).

In summary, the books of the Major Prophets not only show that YHWH goes the way of judgement and redemption with his people, but also that prayers have a serious place in the course of that route. The reality of the covenant creates a two-way traffic that the prophets demonstrate like no other. They are the intermedium for transmitting God's words to Israel but also identify with the people to pursue their interests with God. Moreover, the covenant-given opportunity to appeal to God for his character, reputation and promises proves to be an important way of dealing with complex theological questions raised by his dealings with his people as well as with his prophets (cf. Balentine 1993, p. 9).

Prayer in the Minor Prophets (The Book of the Twelve)

Kathleen M Rochester

Unit for Reformational Theology and the Development of the South African Society,
Faculty of Theology, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa

■ Introduction

It is difficult to precisely define the limits of what constitutes prayer, especially in the prophetic writings, where deep emotional reactions to what the prophets see and hear are expressed in the consciousness of God's presence without the clear articulation of words that we would normally call 'prayer'. Prayer can be regarded as 'the outpouring of the soul' (Bloesch 1988, p. 8); 'a process' with prophetic prayer comprising 'inner transformation, radical revolution, anxious fear and eager longing passing over into serene trust and the joy of calm surrender' (Heiler 1932, p. 284); 'a human-divine dialogue' (Miller 1994, pp. 3, 33); and 'both conversation and encounter with God' (Keller 2014, pp. 13, 14). I will examine a range of communications with God, as well as divine responses that relate to these prayers.

How to cite: Rochester, KM 2023, 'Prayer in the Minor Prophets (The Book of the Twelve)', in AJ Coetsee & FP Viljoen (eds.), *Biblical Theology of prayer in the Old Testament*, Reformed Theology in Africa Series, vol. 12, AOSIS Books, Cape Town, pp. 63-85. <https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2023.BK417.04>

Some studies of prayer focus primarily on the forms used. In this study, I focus primarily on the function of prayer, taking an approach similar to that of Balentine (1993), who adds:

Thus I concentrate on prayer as a literary vehicle for providing characterization (of both prayer and God), for addressing certain themes (e.g. divine justice), and for conveying and promoting certain postures or attitudes (e.g. penitence and contrition). (p. 29)

Greenberg (1983, p. 56) regards prayer as a social transaction between the prayer and God and, importantly, advocates examining this in narrative passages. Many prayers in the Minor Prophets are embedded in a narrative or a frame with a narrative sense, so his approach is relevant to this study. We will therefore examine the process in which both the prayer and the divine partner, God, are engaged. If other aspects of the narrative or surrounding text are relevant to our study, they will also be included.

Andrew Hill (2015, pp. 72-75) gives an excellent summary of the distribution of prayers and prayer forms in these books. His list below includes implied and reported prayers, prayers to other gods and what he calls 'sidelights' to prayer. These are also of interest here because they can assist our understanding of the function of prayer. Although I cast a somewhat wider net and so do not find his list complete or always relevant to my purposes, he identifies ten prayer forms and locates the following examples:

- *Prayers of praise (hymn, doxology, trust, thanksgiving)* – Jonah 2:2-9; Habakkuk 3:1-19; Malachi 1:11 (implied); 14 (implied); 3:10 (implied).
- *Prayers of confession and penitence (including lamentation and mourning)* – Hosea 5:15 (implied); 10:12 (implied); 14:2-3; Joel 1:13; 2:12-17; Amos 5:4-5, 6 (implied); Jonah 3:8-9 (report); Zephaniah 2:3 (implied); 3:2 (implied); Zechariah 7:4-5 (report); Malachi 3:14 (implied).
- *Prayers for others (intercession)* – Amos 7:1-9.
- *Prayers for help (petition)* – Hosea 2:17 (implied); 7:14 (report of insincere prayer); Joel 2:17; Jonah 1:5, 14 (reports); Micah 3:4 (implied); 7:14-17; Zephaniah 1:2-6 (implied to Baal); 3:9 (implied); Zechariah 1:12 (report); 8:21 (report); 13:9 (report); Malachi 1:9 (implied).
- *Prayers of lament (complaint)* – Jonah 4:2-3; Habakkuk 1:2-4, 12-17.
- *Prayers for divine justice* – Amos 2:6-8; 5:10-12; 8:4-6 (sidelights in regard to worship and social justice); Amos 4:1-4, 6-13 (sidelights in regard to theodicy); Micah 3:9-12; 6:6-8 (sidelights in regard to worship and social justice); Zephaniah 1:12 (implied).
- *Prayers of blessings and curse* – Malachi 1:14; 2:2; 3:9 (reports of curse).
- *Prayers of vow-making and oath-taking* – Jonah 1:16 (implied); Nahum 1:15 (implied); Zephaniah 1:5 (implied by god Molech and condemned).
- *Prayers of oracle-seeking* – Hosea 4:12 (implied – to Baal?).
- *Prayers of invocation and benediction* – Malachi 1:9, 14 (implied).

I will include some other examples in my observations below and note where they are not included by Hill. Because the topic is prayer, I use the final form of the text and will leave aside other issues, for example compilation and authorship, as they would distract from our focus.

A cursory examination of the list by Hill demonstrates that in these twelve books prayer is very often implied or reported about other people and is much less frequently directly recorded as a dialogue between the prophet and the LORD (Habakkuk and Jonah are exceptions here). Three books have no prayers recorded or implied: Obadiah, Nahum and Haggai. Hill (2015, p. 76) notes, however, that Haggai ‘makes an immense contribution to the prayer life of post-exilic Israel in mobilizing the people to rebuild the Jerusalem temple’.

I will first give some brief observations about selected passages relevant to prayer in seven of the books: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Micah, Zephaniah, Zechariah and Malachi. Then, I will give a more detailed examination of the remaining two books where prayer plays a central role: Jonah and Habakkuk.

■ Hosea

Although there are very few instances of direct, recorded prayer here, the whole book has the covenant as its foundational relationship between God and his people. Within such a relationship, dialogue is expected. It is expressed relationally and emotionally by both God and his prophet Hosea, as Hosea repeatedly shows solidarity with the LORD’s thoughts and feelings.

Several instances of implied prayers to Canaanite gods (Hs 2:17; 4:12; 7:14) support the assertions in the book that the people are now falsely wed to the Baals. In Hosea 9:10, the root of this apostasy is given as their seduction at Baal-peor. As Hosea feels the pain of unfaithfulness from his own covenanted wife, he calls for people to seek the LORD (Hs 10:12) and offer prayers of repentance (Hs 5:15; 14:2–3).

The clearest example of prophetic prayer here is in Hosea 9:14 and perhaps Verse 17 (Beeby 1989, pp. 122–123; Hubbard 1989, p. 166), both not included by Hill, and shows Hosea interjecting with responses to what he hears the LORD tell him. Hosea’s question concerns the fruit (the children) of a shameful idolatrous liaison. God has already threatened infertility (Hs 9:11, 12). How can Hosea pray for his people? He remains aligned with God and prays for miscarrying wombs and dry breasts. Beeby (1989, p. 123) asks if this prayer is then both a modified curse and partial blessing. He goes on to note that Hosea 9:17 can also be translated as a prayer, beginning with ‘Let my God reject them’ (Beeby 1989, p. 125). It is clear that having been in the very presence of the LORD, Hosea has heard, understood, accepted, and is now in agreement with God’s judgement of his disobedient people.

■ Joel

A locust plague has caused widespread devastation and grief. A call for repentance (Jl 1:13–20), presumably given by the prophet, is made in light of the coming day of the LORD (Jl 1:15). The first direct, recorded prayer by the prophet Joel (not included by Hill) occurs in 1:19, 20. It is largely a despairing description of the devastated landscape, yet the fact that he turns spontaneously to the LORD ('To you, O LORD, I call') is also a sign of his deepest hope (Craigie 1984, p. 96).

The LORD himself now calls the people to repentance (Jl 2:12–17) and includes a prayer of repentance for the priests to lead the people in saying (Jl 2:17). A clear response by the LORD is given (Jl 2:18–32 and continuing through ch. 3). Is this a response to a mere recitation of a given, liturgical prayer? The key words in the LORD's plea in Joel 2:12 are 'return to me with all your heart'. The LORD's response, indicating promises of blessing, cannot simply be to an empty recitation. It must indicate that a turning has taken place in the hearts of the people, a choice to return to the LORD. The change in the people leads to a change in God, who now expresses pity for his people.²¹

Another fleeting but significant direct prayer (also not included by Hill) occurs in Joel 3:11b. As Joel is, like Hosea, in an intimate conversational setting with the LORD, he hears of God's plans for the nations who have mistreated Israel. Joel spontaneously issues an ejaculatory prayer, 'Bring down your warriors, O LORD!' which functions as Joel's passionate agreement with what the LORD has just declared, meaning 'Amen! Let it happen, LORD!'

■ Amos

Strong emotional language is used by the LORD in Chapter 5 (not included by Hill), beginning with lament and culminating in the language of curse (Am 5:18 'Woe to you who long for the day of the LORD!') and hatred (Am 5:21 'I hate, I despise your religious feasts'). The provocation for this lies in violations of justice in the community (Am 5:24) that are incongruent with their worship performances. Amos catches the LORD's emotions, feels them and passes them on in his passionate retelling of what he has heard. This would not normally be called prayer, but it does demonstrate an important prophetic component of prayer: good listening to both words and emotions. In Amos 5:4–6, the LORD calls the people to genuine prayer, which he says is essentially 'seek the LORD and live!' and turn away from false worship.

Dialogue between Amos and the LORD occurs in Amos 7:1–9 (not included by Hill). Initiated by the LORD, it is a two-way prayer conversation that

21. See my brief discussion of lament and discernment in Joel in Rochester (2012b, pp. 83–86).

includes three static visionary images implying threats to the future of Israel. After each of the first two images of judgement – by locust plague then fire – Amos cries out as he petitions God in intercessory, protest prayers, saying ‘How can Jacob survive? He is so small!’ (Am 7:2, 5). In each case, the LORD relents from sending these.²² After the third image, Amos is asked, ‘What do you see?’²³ Amos answers, ‘A plumb line’, without any further protest or intercession. Then the LORD speaks of what he intends to do. A similar pattern, but using only one static image, is repeated in Amos 8:1-3, where the LORD shows Amos a basket of ripe fruit (again, not included by Hill). The same question, ‘What do you see?’ is asked, and after Amos’ answer, which again contains no petition of intercession and no protest, the LORD explains its meaning.

Our contemporary ideas about prayer often focus on prayer as a human initiative. However, Peterson (1987, p. 33) says that ‘prayer is answering speech. The first word is God’s word’. Amos is one example among many in the Minor Prophets where God is the initiator of dialogue and, therefore, of prayer.²⁴

■ Micah

As for many of the other Minor Prophets (Hosea, Joel, Jonah, Zephaniah, Haggai and Zechariah), the introduction indicates that Micah experiences the word of the LORD (or, for Nahum, Habakkuk and Malachi, an oracle). Here the word is also called a vision concerning Samaria and Jerusalem, instructing Micah to declare that ‘the sovereign LORD may witness against you’ (Mi 1:1, 2). Micah is left in mourning. Throughout this book, Micah’s grief always accompanies his speech about judgement.²⁵ Greed and injustice abound and are supported by false prophets.

Micah 3:4 says that some ‘will cry out to the LORD, but he will not answer them. At that time, he will hide his face from them because of the evil they have done’. This kind of prayer is unacceptable to God because of their evil deeds. Even prophets will receive no answer from God (3:5-7) if they are unfaithful to God and lead the people astray. Answers to prayer, then,

22. Beeley (1970, p. 90) writes, ‘The language of God repenting after Amos interceded successfully is not that God changed his mind but that he changed his course of action. He withheld the fully deserved punishment’. Heschel (1969, pp. 35, 36) writes, “‘The LORD repented” not because the people are innocent, but because they are small [...] mercy is a perpetual possibility.’ (Am 5:15).

23. Reminiscent of the static images and the same question in Jeremiah 1:11-13.

24. See also my brief discussion of lament and discernment in Amos in Rochester (2012b, pp. 86-87).

25. Heschel (1969, pp. 99, 100) writes: ‘Micah does not question the justice of the severe punishment which he predicts for his people. Yet it is not in the name of justice that he speaks, but in the name of a God who “delights in steadfast love”. [...] He conveys God’s reluctance and sorrow in his anger (Mi 5:15)’.

depend on living with integrity before God. Micah, on the other hand, is 'filled with the Spirit of the LORD' (Mi 3:8), implying not only courage and truth in speaking but, in context, divine answers to his prayers.

After a rather depressing description of his situation, Micah decides to watch and wait for God, his saviour, and expresses his confidence that his God will hear him (Mi 7:7). Then he prays (Mi 7:14–20), beginning with a petition asking the LORD to once again shepherd his people (v. 14) (Hill includes only part of this prayer). As he recalls the power of God in the past, he has hope that 'nations will see and be ashamed' (v. 16). Finally, he turns directly to God in wonder, immersing himself in God's character, then affirming his trust that the LORD 'will be true to Jacob' in the future (vv. 18–20).

■ Zephaniah

There is no direct, reported prayer between this prophet and the LORD. All references to prayer, whether to the LORD or to Baal, are implied. Zephaniah passes on God's warning of coming destruction for the wicked. Judah is the first nation to be judged; their worship of Baal, Molech, and the stars indicates that they 'turn back from following the LORD and neither seek the LORD nor inquire of him' (Zph 1:6). The implication is that their prayers are not to the LORD and that this turning away is foundational to the wickedness in their lives. They need to 'be silent before the LORD' (Zph 1:7), implying turning to the LORD with humility, reverence and readiness to listen before they speak. More explicitly, they are called to seek the LORD, to seek righteousness and humility, and to obey him (Zph 2:3). This is a call to acceptable prayer and corresponding behaviour.

Jerusalem is characterised as being rebellious and defiled (Zph 3:1). There is no acceptable prayer because the people do not heed correction nor draw near to the LORD in trust (Zph 3:2). However, there is an anticipation of change. The LORD will actively purify the lips of the people so that they may call on the name of the LORD (Zph 3:9), and those who are humble and who trust in the name of the LORD will remain where they are (Zph 3:12). The delightful image of the LORD rejoicing over his people with singing (Zph 3:17) demonstrates the restoration of a two-way relationship with such people. Dialogue then becomes a mutually enjoyable experience.

■ Zechariah

In the period of temple rebuilding in Jerusalem, Zechariah receives a question about fasting in certain months (Zch 7:1–14). The prophet is instructed by the LORD to ask whether the fasts in the past were for themselves or really for the LORD. Fasting is always accompanied by prayer.

Boda (2004) says that because fasting was usually associated with a disaster, it:

[F]unctioned not only as a penitential act representing the sorrow of the people for sin (Joel 2:12-13) but also as a communicative act, a cry to the God who could transform their circumstances. (p. 357)

However, the LORD also requires actions of justice and mercy (Zch 7:10). Unfortunately, the people harden their hearts and refuse to listen. Thus the LORD concludes, 'When I called, they did not listen, so when they called, I would not listen' (Zch 7:13). Neither fasting nor prayer has been effective.

Yet there is hope that many other peoples will seek the LORD (Zch 8:20-23), which implies that they will pray effectively. After a testing and refining time, there will also be some from Israel who will genuinely call on the name of the LORD and the LORD will answer them (Zch 13:9). Boda (2004, p. 513) writes, 'Calling on God's name is used for several types of interchange between God and his people, including sacrifice, thanksgiving and petition'. In reality, prayer is involved in all of these activities, so these people will be effective prayers. The LORD will say they are his people, and they will say, 'The LORD is our God'.

■ Malachi

Parts of this book (in chs. 1 and 3) are written in the style of a very frank conversation between the LORD and his people, Israel, similar to dialogues we find in some other prophetic books, notably Jeremiah. However, here the dialogue is hypothetical and is presented to the people as a tool of instruction. The style does, however, show that both the prophet and the people share a common awareness that such a dialogue is very plausible.

Throughout the first such dialogue (MI 1:2-14), there are references to cultic contexts, for example, placing defiled food on an altar, offerings, incense, vows and sacrifices, and these are all associated with prayer. The subsequent hypothetical conversation about tithes (MI 3:6-18) functions similarly. Although these are not real prayers, they do give implied rebuke and valuable teaching about worship. Malachi, through these imagined prayer dialogues, urges the people to implore God to be gracious (MI 1:9), to bring pure incense and offerings (MI 1:11, 14), as well as the whole tithe (MI 3:10).

■ Jonah

Prayer in the book of Jonah is firmly embedded in a narrative: a prophetic narrative (Allen 1976, p. 175) or a didactic narrative (Schellenberg 2015, p. 366). Throughout the narrative, it is important to notice when prayer is absent and when it is present; who is praying and who is not; when prayer is expressed in

a structured offering to God; and when it is a dynamic, passionate conversational exchange between human and divine speakers. Along the way there are noteworthy prayers reported involving secondary characters. But at the heart of this ironic and even comical story is a serious prayer relationship, even when troubled and under threat, between Jonah and God.

Benckhuysen (2012, p. 21) considers that ‘the abrupt beginning of Chapter 1 invites the reader to consider the book of Jonah within the context of [the] larger biblical tradition about the prophet’. I take it as likely that he is the same Jonah, son of Amittai, mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25 from Gath Hopher, not far from Nazareth, who had prophesied the restoration of Israel’s boundaries from Lebo Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah. Interestingly, Jeroboam, a northern king who is said to have done evil in the sight of the LORD, carried out this restoration successfully. This suggests that Jonah is to be regarded as a genuine prophet of the LORD. There are many intertextual links with earlier prophets, for example, Jeremiah, Moses and Elijah. These intertextual connections confirm that we must regard him as being rooted in Israel’s prophetic tradition. His familiarity with the Psalms, seen in Chapter 2, further serves to show that he is grounded in Israel’s prayer tradition.

■ Chapter 1

The opening of the book is typical for a prophetic book, ‘The word of the LORD came to Jonah, son of Amittai’ (Jnh 1:1). This is followed by a typical command to go and to preach somewhere, even though the location, Nineveh, is unexpected and unprecedented. However, the absence of any recorded prayer-response from Jonah, together with his action of blatant non-compliance, is both unusual and alarming for a prophet of Israel. Jonah has been close enough to the LORD to hear his genuine word.²⁶ The direction of Jonah’s running, away from the LORD’s appointed place, also reminds us of the other directional terms used throughout the prophetic literature denoting a person’s proximity to the LORD (e.g. ‘turn to him’, ‘do not turn away from him’). He is also running away from any kind of engagement with him through prayer. If we pause in our reading at this point, we might well wonder whether that is, or perhaps whether it should be, the end of the LORD’s engagement with Jonah.

The next action is taken by the LORD: he sends a violent storm.²⁷ As Jonah avoided speaking to God, God avoids speaking to Jonah. As Jonah took an

26. Cf. Jeremiah 23:18 on the importance of a prophet standing in the council of the LORD to be close enough to hear him.

27. Gary Yates (2016, p. 231) notes that the storm in Jonah ‘provides an ironic echo of Jeremiah’s oracle condemning false prophets in Jeremiah 23:18–22, where ‘the wrath of YHWH will rage like a “storm”’.

action against the direction of the LORD's appointment, the LORD takes an action against the direction of Jonah's choice.

Fear motivates the pagan sailors to pray,²⁸ to call out to their own gods, as they also lighten the ship's load. The pagan captain searches for Jonah and desperately urges him to wake up and pray. But there is no sign that Jonah prays. As lots are cast and Jonah is found responsible for this calamity, he gives basic but religiously orthodox answers to their questions. 'I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of Heaven, who made the sea and the land' (Jnh 1:9). This, at least, is somewhat more faithful than avoiding all mention of his God. In this terrifying crisis, Jonah confesses that he is the only one who has direct access to the very one who *made* the sea that is threatening to consume them! Yet Jonah still refuses to engage directly with his God: he refuses to pray.

Jonah then confesses that the terrible storm is his fault and asks the sailors to throw him into the sea. Is this a sign of compassion for the innocent others on the ship who might, through his heroic self-sacrifice, be saved? Or is this a death-wish, a further desire to escape from his God and his mission? Could it be both? We cannot be sure. By the end of this chapter, the sea has calmed down, the others onboard are safe, and the sailors have prayed again with vows and sacrifices to the LORD, that is, to YHWH, Jonah's God, instead of to their previous gods. The words of their prayer are given: 'O LORD, please do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man' (Jnh 1:14). There is not only fear here, but also conscience. They do not want to participate in killing an innocent man, even if the purpose is their own salvation. Through their reluctant acceptance of Jonah's self-offering, they are saved. Perhaps at this point we might be able to conclude that Jonah's sacrificial service, the best he could offer in the circumstances, together with his brief statement of faith, have benefitted others, physically and spiritually. We might pause and wonder if this could be a reasonably satisfying ending to the story.

■ Chapter 2

The surprising introduction of the great fish opens an astonishing new focus on Jonah's inner life as he hovers between death and life, unable to run anywhere for 'three days and three nights'.²⁹ His level of distress causes

28. Perry (2006, pp. 109, 110) makes the point that prayer and fear are intimately connected. He suggests that 'Jonah has lost his fear and regains it only at the bottom of the mountains' in Chapter 2 when he does pray.

29. Ellul (1971, p. 17) says, 'Whether or not the book is historical is of secondary importance, for the story finds its true value not in itself, in what it is, but in what it denotes'. The duration of time in the fish suggests a stock Hebrew idiomatic expression, indicating parts of three consecutive days, rather than three periods of 24 h (cf. Es 4:16; Mt 12:40).

Jonah to finally pray! There is no dialogue here, and he may not yet be ready to hear again from God. Rather, his mind seems to turn back to patterns and phrases of prayer that he has memorised from the Psalter.³⁰ However, now they are personalised. He senses that as he calls to the LORD from this ‘rock bottom’ place, God answers him. We have not before seen Jonah asking for help, but instead simply refusing to do something that seemed too hard for him. It is only ‘from the depths of the grave’, an image of death or at the very least utter helplessness, that his pride is swallowed and he actually calls out to God for help (Jnh 2:2), a step which proves crucial in the transformation of his perspective.

Jonah now attributes the ultimate cause of his burial in the depths of that nautical grave to the LORD, yet the memory of his own part in self-offering and the sailors’ part in throwing him overboard is not obscured, for it remains in the narrative of our first chapter. Perhaps he sees the LORD as the instigator of the violent storm, in agreement with the text in Jonah 1:4. Prayer brings the focus of Jonah’s attention to his God, whom he now, for the first time, addresses as ‘you’. Circumstances now constrain him to face the LORD instead of running away from him. If Jonah had imagined that being plunged to his death would allow him to exit this life peacefully into oblivion, he was mistaken. Instead, it seems that the LORD himself has orchestrated this dramatic ordeal and created the situation where Jonah has nowhere else to go but to face him.

Jonah declares, ‘I said, “I have been banished from your sight”’ (Jnh 2:4). This sounds ironic as Jonah was the one who had banished the LORD from his sight! Perhaps he supposes that the expected response from God would be to do the same to him. Certainly, Jonah has felt a great distance between him and God. Yet this supposedly banishing God has strangely thrust Jonah into a place where the two would have to meet. Jonah’s instinctive response, ‘yet I will look again toward your holy temple’ (Jnh 2:4) indicates unlikely, new hope. It might seem odd to be talking about the temple from the belly of a fish and an imminent death, but the temple represents, in Jonah’s mind and memory, the dwelling place of God with his people, the place of prayer to which he had turned, the place of the divine and the human coming together.

30. Ian Vaillancourt (2015) gives a useful summary of the various scholarly positions taken concerning this prayer and advocates an interpretation which retains this psalm in its narrative context, a position which I adopt. LaCocque and LaCocque (1990) give a short summary of the structure of this psalm: (1) a short introduction, showing gratitude; (2) an exposition of the writer’s experience; (3) a prayer (vv. 3, 8); and (4) a vow to offer thanksgiving sacrifices (v. 10). They also cite examples (1990, p. 98) of themes here that are also present in the biblical psalms: v. 3 cf. Psalms 120:1; 18:6; v. 4 cf. Psalms 42:7; v. 6 cf. Psalms 69:2; v. 7 cf. Psalms 18:16; 30:3; and v. 8 cf. Psalms 142:3; 143:4. Many have observed that there are no words of repentance in Jonah’s psalm, but I note that such words are fairly rare in the biblical psalms, so other markers of change need to be noted.

Ironically again, the further down Jonah goes, in words that suggest an experience of near-drowning, Jonah simultaneously describes an upward journey in which the LORD ‘brought [his] life up from the pit’ (Jnh 2:6). Could this upward dimension have only been added later, once he was firmly planted again on dry land? Not necessarily. There are signs in some psalms that others also experience an emotional transition from despair to hope and even thanksgiving for salvation before there is any change in their circumstances or any answer to their prayer.³¹

It is precisely while Jonah is dying that he remembers the LORD. We understand here that he exercises the kind of active memory that prompts him to re-engage in the action of prayer. Jonah then recognises the stark consequence of following false gods (or worthless vanities) as missing out on love (or grace). Now Jonah decides to recommit himself to follow the God he had turned away from. Now he is ready to seal his decision with sacrifice and fulfilment of vows. Now he has come to the same point as the sailors (Jnh 1:16) when they had turned from their false gods to Jonah’s God. While Jonah has not needed to turn back from following false gods, he has turned back from the emptiness of his own vain thinking.

■ Chapter 3

After Jonah is vomited out of the fish onto dry land, he is given a second chance. God does not engage in any extended dialogue at this point, but merely reiterates his previous commission, and this time Jonah obeys. His message gives the required warning, but there is an absence of the usual signs of a prophet’s love for the people and words of pleading so that people might be saved from disaster.³² Even so, people somehow recognise that his message is from God (Jnh 3:5). There is an astounding response of repentance on the part of the people and then the king, who urges people to pray and turn away from evil and violence. This king seems to understand that prayer and appropriate action must be linked. God responds and disaster is averted, suggesting that the prayer and the corresponding actions of the Ninevites were acceptable. Once again, we might wonder if the story could end here. Jonah has eventually done as the LORD asked and the results are spectacular! As a prophet, Jonah has had accidental success in influencing the mariners on his ship. And, as a reluctant prophet, his message of very few words, probably without any further signs of compassion, has met with outstanding success.

31. Psalm 13 is one example of this, where Verses 5 and 6 demonstrate such a transition.

32. Moberly (2003, pp. 164–165) cites P Trible, T Fretheim, and RJ Lubeck to support his claim that Jonah makes only a half-hearted effort to convey the message.

■ Chapter 4

In this final section, we are brought back to an intimate lament prayer that provokes a dialogue between Jonah and the LORD, as if the primary interest in the story should be more 'in here' than 'out there'.³³

Jonah is angry.³⁴ It emerges that his anger is now similar to that which led him to run away to Tarshish at the beginning of the book. The most hopeful difference now is that he stays in one place and prays, attempting to articulate the issue that fuels his angry feelings directly to the LORD as a lament prayer. We discover that Jonah's initial problem with God has not been resolved. We have no evidence that he prayed previously, as he is doing now. Yet, he presumes that God does know what he had thought all along. If he had consciously articulated it to God before, he had not waited for any response and, instead, ran away.

Jonah has some kind of inner conflict between what he has learnt about the LORD and the mission on which the LORD has sent him. He knows that the LORD is 'a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love' (Ex 34:6) and that he is a God who 'relents from sending calamity'.³⁵ The message he was to bring to Nineveh was a warning about impending calamity. He would have known that such a message was common for prophets to bring and that repentance was usually urged. Jeremiah's words in Jeremiah 18:8 that people of any nation could avoid calamity through repentance would also have been known. So what was Jonah's problem?

Having recently been rescued from death, Jonah now asks the LORD to take away his life, deciding that it is better for him to die than to live (Jnh 4:3). The precise cause of this outburst, or its relationship to the LORD's compassion is still not clear to the reader. However, the LORD replies, not directly to Jonah's words, but to his emotion, to his anger. Some samples of how the LORD's reply (Jnh 4:4) is translated in English versions include, 'Is it right for you to be angry?' (NIV and NRSV); 'Do you have a good reason to be angry?' (NASB); or 'Are you really so very angry?' (NET).

33. Perry (2006, p. 111) notes that 'the same word for praying is used (2:2; 4:2), and this passage, in fact, through its allusion to Jonah's opening flight to Tarshish, unifies the entire book under the sign of prayer'. See my study of lament prayers in narrative passages through the Old Testament (Rochester 2012a); a brief examination of Jonah (Rochester 2012b, pp. 87-91) shows that his lament prayer in 4:1-3 does lead to the possibility of discernment, as is usual for other Old Testament (OT) lament prayers.

34. Barbara Green (2006) takes an insightful Biblical Spirituality approach which influenced my own approach here.

35. This last part is the same as Joel 2:13.

The LORD questions whether Jonah's anger (or the depth of his anger) is really appropriate in this situation.³⁶

In the OT, it is very rare for the LORD to rebuke someone for their anger, or indeed any strong emotions, when expressed directly to God. These are almost always accepted as an honest outpouring from the heart. However, the prophet Jeremiah, who frequently engaged with God in very candid conversations where emotions were expressed freely, did find that there was a limit to God's tolerance. In Jeremiah's prayer in Jeremiah 15:10–21, emotions of grief, pain, disappointment and anger flow freely. He wonders if it would have been better had he not been born (Jr 15:10) and receives divine reassurance. Each of his other grievances receive gracious responses. However, when Jeremiah cries out about his unending pain and asks the LORD whether he, God, will be like a deceptive brook that fails, he hears, 'If you repent, I will restore you [...]' (Jr 15:19). The LORD will not allow an unjustified fear of abandonment to drag Jeremiah into a bog of despondency and calls him out on the need to change direction in his thinking. If the emotion expressed is associated with an outright refusal to follow the LORD, the LORD sometimes expresses his own anger. This is the case in Moses' call dialogue (Ex 3 and 4). After expressing his many objections and hearing gracious responses from the LORD each time, the one request that is met with a different response is, 'O LORD, please send someone else to do it' (Ex 4:13). The LORD's anger burns against Moses. It is clear that effectively saying 'No!' crosses a line that will not be tolerated. Yet that is not necessarily the end of the conversation or the relationship.

Jonah's anger has already resulted in one refusal to go to Nineveh, and now, after he has eventually and reluctantly obeyed, his death-wish is a means of requesting another, final way of opting out of any future serving of the LORD. It is another way of saying, 'No!' Yet God chooses to address his anger rather than his death-wish.

Could it be that Jonah's turning to God and recommitment in Chapter 2 should now be viewed as superficial or even false, in light of his outbursts in Chapter 4? If so, we need to consider two questions: (1) Was there a corresponding action to support Jonah's recommitment in Chapter 2? Yes, it was his new obedience to his original commission. Yet the delivery of his message may have lacked his full engagement. The narrative, then, invites us to see his repentance as genuine but perhaps lacking in depth. And (2) why, in Chapter 4, does the LORD consider it important to engage in dialogue with Jonah as he would another prophet in difficulty, like Jeremiah, if his

36. Peterson (1992, pp. 157–158) writes about Jonah's anger: the usefulness of anger is as a diagnostic tool to signal that something is wrong, but it does not tell us whether the wrong is outside us or inside us. In Jonah's case, 'his wrong is not in his head but in his heart'.

supposed recommitment was not at all genuine? Jonah would not be the first person considered broadly faithful to God (e.g. King David) who needed to be challenged again (in the matter of the census) after previous repentance (for adultery) and then faithful actions. For those whose hearts have fully turned away, God does not normally continue to engage in dialogue (e.g. King Saul, who is frustrated that he cannot find a word from the LORD). I suggest that the narrative invites us to read the dialogue in Chapter 4 as evidence of a continuing relationship between Jonah and the LORD, a relationship that is now ready to explore an issue lying well below the surface and to confront differences in thinking honestly without either party leaving. More importantly, it offers an invitation not only for cognitive discussion but for Jonah to come to really *know* God.³⁷

As Jonah does not answer the LORD's question about his anger, God decides to take a different approach. He offers an analogy on the vexed subject of his own compassion, here in relation to Nineveh, by providing a new experience which he knows will engage and stir an emotion in Jonah that is somewhat similar.³⁸ This conversation starter will open a way back to the unanswered question and the problematic issue that Jonah has identified but is not yet able to discuss. Perhaps we might call this kind of provocative action and dialogue 'educative' on God's part.³⁹

Jonah is really pleased when God's gift of an unexpected shade plant brings relief from the hot sun. Then, when the LORD provides a worm to eat the plant and causes it to wither, Jonah becomes very uncomfortable from the heat and pronounces, 'It would be better for me to die than to live' (Jnh 4:8). He has not moved beyond his earlier assertion (Jnh 4:3). We can easily identify with Jonah's needs in very hot weather and his emotions of delight and relief as well as disappointment, discomfort and frustration. However, the LORD now provokes Jonah to apply his question to the shade plant (Jnh 4:9): 'Have you any right to be angry about the plant?'

Jonah seems to be stuck in the same negative emotional response when something displeases him. And this time, his response is obviously far more extreme than the situation would warrant. We have seen Jonah respond with happier emotions when he is pleased, both when he is rescued and when he is given relief from the heat by the shade plant, but we have not seen evidence of emotional concern for others. He shows no overt emotions

37. The importance of 'knowing God' is at the fore in the early chapters of Jeremiah (e.g. Jr 4:22).

38. LaCocque and Lacocque (1990, pp. 149-152) here demonstrate a clear parallel with the interactions between Elijah and the LORD in 1 Kings 19.

39. Moberly (2015, pp. 181-210) calls this educative process an 'enacted parable' (p. 206) such as might be found in the Wisdom literature, relying on experiences of the created order. Moberly's approach is to see Jonah as 'not knowing what he ought to know' (p. 209). While Jonah knows theological statements, they need to be connected to life (p. 210).

towards the mariners; his emotions towards the Ninevites are at first likely very negative because he initially refused to go to them. When he does go, he gives the required message but, in contrast with other prophets, shows no signs of emotional engagement with them. He does not even rejoice in the astonishing success of his mission!

Jonah has identified that his problem with the LORD relates to God's emotions: specifically, his compassion. The context suggests that it is specifically God's compassion towards Nineveh. Before we, who live in a global village, too easily condemn Jonah, we need to observe that the LORD considers it worthwhile to expend effort and engage with Jonah with the aim of leading him towards greater empathy and a better understanding of himself. After all, Jonah's call to give warning to an outside group of people, particularly those with the known capacity to act as enemies of his own people, is unprecedented. Other prophets speak with compassion to their own people. Their history is saturated with God's particular compassion for their own people. Are not foreigners who worship other gods and live by different values to be regarded with suspicion for their own safety? Would it not be unjust, even treacherous, to prioritise the needs of outsiders over the needs of their own families and tribes? How trustworthy could the repentance be of people known as evil? Surely God should be concerned with vindicating the innocent, not the guilty? How can this bring honour to God's name and to the people who are called by his name?⁴⁰ All of these concerns are valid, yet answering each one point by point may still not satisfy Jonah.

The LORD now points to an emotion with which he and Jonah can both identify. We might call it care or concern, or even compassion. Jonah felt it for the shade plant (Jnh 4:10). He had not known it or had any part in making it grow, and it was only in his life for one day. Yet he cared passionately about it. God cares passionately about Nineveh.⁴¹ He does know it – the people and the animals. He knows the number of people and he knows their great ignorance of right and wrong (they 'cannot tell their right hand from their left', Jnh 4:11).⁴²

We are left with the LORD's final question (Jnh 4:11): 'Should I not be concerned about that great city?' Jonah's response is unknown. Perhaps if

40. The last two questions are suggested by Lacocque and Lacocque (1990, p. 146). Benckhuysen (2012, p. 25) notes that 'Jonah's flight from G'd's commission may reflect not simply the reluctance of Jonah toward a prophetic calling, as some scholars have suggested, but rather protest and advocacy for the people of Israel'.

41. Here an *a fortiori* argument is used (Allen 1976, p. 234).

42. Joyce Baldwin (1993, p. 590) writes, 'By Israel's standards the population of Nineveh was uninstructed and morally naïve'.

we knew his response, we would move on too quickly to either exonerate Jonah for a satisfyingly happy ending or condemn Jonah for a sense of smug satisfaction in our own superiority over Jonah. Instead, as we laugh at Jonah's antics along the way, we are left with more than a sneaking suspicion that, in our hidden places, we are like him. In addition to consideration of the LORD's compassion for such undeserving foreigners and their surprising readiness to repent, there is another implied message here: how much more should Jonah and those like him be quick to repent to avert their own disaster!⁴³ The LORD's final question, then, lingers with us.

■ Habakkuk

Prayer permeates this book and is its most propelling ingredient.⁴⁴ Prayer actively elicits responses, both from YHWH and from the prophet. Prayer instigates change and opens the way for new understanding. The autobiographical frame of this book, which provides an overarching narrative sense, enables us to examine the function of prayer within the life of the prophet Habakkuk and, no doubt, his implied community. While some consider the heart of this book to be theodicy, its dynamic is far removed from the detached concern of systematic theology.⁴⁵ Rather, 'the entire book asks to be read as a whole conversation' (Moseman 2017, p. 261), a human-divine conversation that is prayer.

Although there are several ways of describing the structure of the book, it can be very simply outlined in two parts as follows:

1. Habakkuk 1:1-2:20, consisting of the first lament prayer (Hab 1:2-4) and the first divine response (Hab 1:5-11), the second lament prayer (Hab 1:12-17) and the second divine response (Hab 2:1-20)
2. Habakkuk 3:1-19, a concluding psalm, simply called a prayer.

The work is declared to be an oracle or burden which Habakkuk the prophet received (Hab 1:1). This suggests that the emphasis in reading this book should be on what is divinely given. Yet all that the LORD gives is very clearly related to the prayers that come before. Because of this close and clear relationship between prayers and divine responses throughout the book,

43. This implied question would be congruent with the Jewish reading of this book on the Day of Atonement and implies another *a fortiori* argument.

44. Thomas (2018, p. 170) notes that prayer is foundational for the book of Habakkuk.

45. Whitehead (2016, p. 268) considers that 'Habakkuk is not a theodicy in the traditional sense of the Christian theological tradition [...] [but] seeks to address how the righteous person should behave in a situation in which divine providence appears slow, inactive, or unjust'. Nysse (2017, p. 156) notes that 'biblical laments are not theodicies. A theodicy seeks an explanation while a lament seeks a change in conditions'.

our focus on prayer will necessarily also attend to any responses, insights or changes that occur consequent to the prayers.⁴⁶

■ Chapter 1

‘How long?’ and ‘Why?’ are the prophet’s cries (Hab 1:2, 3), echoing the cries in many lament psalms (e.g. Ps 2:1; 10:1, 13; 13:1–2). The form of this first lament prayer to YHWH (Hab 1:2–4) is typical, except that it has no petition (Balentine 1993, p. 183). Habakkuk’s previous unanswered prayers regarding these issues of injustice drive Habakkuk to a new and urgent demand for a divine response. This time it seems that Habakkuk is no longer prepared to continue praying this kind of prayer repeatedly, so he speaks in such a way that indicates he now expects an answer. ‘How long must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, “Violence!” but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong?’ (Hab 1:2–3). His prophetic outrage over the shocking and inexplicable injustice and violence in his supposedly Torah-honouring community now presses him forward to face the one who has supreme authority and ultimate power. Perhaps he has spoken to the human leaders too many times and found the exercise futile. Now, as he faces God, his speech is forthright, graphic and accusatory. This seems to be his last-ditch effort to gain a divine response.⁴⁷

The historical setting is likely to be during King Jehoiakim’s reign, a period of great wickedness led by the king.⁴⁸ The book of Jeremiah attests to that. An exacerbation of evil also occurred because Jehoiakim was a vassal of Babylonia, meeting his overlord’s requirement to host foreign idols as Manasseh had done under Assyrian lordship. The Torah, including biblical laws and traditional teaching, was intended to preserve good relationships in society and to curb injustice, violence, conflict, and unfair treatment by the wicked over the righteous. But Habakkuk claims that the Torah is paralysed. It is not taken seriously or valued for its benefits to society. The result is a very perturbing level of ruthless, unchecked destruction. How especially shocking that this is happening among the LORD’s own people! Surely God has a responsibility to respond!

The LORD does respond with an oracle (Hab 1:5–11). There is an initial command for Habakkuk to look beyond his own people, with an assurance that YHWH has heard and has made a very surprising plan. This brief

46. See my article ‘Habakkuk: A Guide to Prayer’ (Rochester 2012a). I also briefly discuss lament and discernment in Habakkuk in Rochester (2012b, pp. 91–94).

47. Nysse (2017, p. 157) points out that this opening lament contradicts the expected prophetic speech. However, Jeremiah’s so-called ‘confessions’ include much lament prayer.

48. See Thompson (1993, pp. 35–36) for further details about this.

welcome assurance is immediately shattered by the shocking announcement that the LORD will raise up his people's powerful but totally unscrupulous enemies, the Babylonians, to act on his behalf, presumably against his own people.⁴⁹ And to make it clear that God knows exactly how ruthless, arrogant and lawless these people are, the following words give graphic images of their appalling, inhumane ways.

Habakkuk is greatly shocked. In his second lament prayer (Hab 1:12-17), he pours out his honest confusion and impassioned questions regarding this terrible and incomprehensible news. As before, there is no petition. He again directly addresses God as YHWH, but also invokes other images of God: the Holy One, the Rock and, by implication, the Judge. This news does not seem congruent with his understanding of the LORD as perfect holiness, as immovable foundation or as righteous judge. Habakkuk is confused and attempts to make some sense of what cannot make sense. Is not the LORD eternal? Does he not know, with his superior knowledge of the truth, how to enact judgement that truly fits the crime? Is not the LORD so totally pure that he cannot tolerate being in the presence of evil?⁵⁰ Using such wicked people as the Babylonians against his not-so-wicked fellow Judahites would be a very disproportional judgement; using evil people to do his bidding violates his own good and holy character.

Habakkuk moves beyond expressions of his puzzlement to frame questions that are more direct, using 'Why?': 'Why do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?' He wants some clear answers.

Now Habakkuk's mind ruminates on an image of his people being like leaderless sea creatures, vulnerable to being captured by a cruel enemy who treats them like mere fish to be hauled in for the catch.⁵¹ The enemy, who represents the Babylonians in their pagan arrogance, are even said to offer sacrifices to their nets, not even to a higher god, and live in luxury at the expense of those they have cruelly captured. Once more, a question

49. Achtemeier (1986, p. 38) shows that the mention of the 'law' of the Babylonians in Habakkuk 1:7 refers to God's decision that because his לְחֵקֶיךָ was rejected, another לְחֵקֶיךָ – Babylon's – would be imposed as their punishment.

50. In Habakkuk 1:12, the phrase often translated as 'we will not die' is based on a scribal adjustment to the Masoretic Text's (MT's) original 'you will not die'. Bruce (1993, p. 852) notes that eighteen scribal corrections (of which this is one) were made to change expressions about God that might be felt to be objectionable. Even the thought of God dying was an abomination. Bruce keeps the original and translates it as 'you are immortal'.

51. Roberts (1991, p. 104) suggests that Habakkuk may have used this metaphor because a fishing net was one of the primary weapons used by the mythic Marduk to conquer Tiamat. In addition, the net was an ancient Mesopotamian symbol of military power.

arises: Is the enemy to keep on doing this without mercy? This is, in effect, a variation of the 'How long?' question often found in lament prayers.⁵²

■ Chapter 2

Habakkuk's decision to wait actively for the LORD to answer his second lament prayer is crucial (Hab 2:1). It is a courageous decision because the LORD's first answer was disturbing, to say the least, and he is alert as he waits for a response. A decision to avoid further direct engagement with God would, at this point, be understandable. Jonah had made such a choice, even though he could still recite his orthodox beliefs *about* his God when prompted (Jnh 1:9); his avoidance of God and his mission cost him and others dearly. Habakkuk stays because resolution can only come with perseverance in waiting, even while still being in the midst of pain, confusion and turmoil.

After an unknown length of time, the LORD does reply with another oracle (Hab 2:2-5). First, Habakkuk is to be ready to write down this revelation on tablets. An allusion to the tablets on which the Decalogue was written is likely (Robertson 1990, p. 168), alerting Habakkuk to the great importance of the message he will now be given. The writing must be very clear and easy to read so that the message can be readily passed on. Patience will be needed, and further waiting will be required. God's revelation will be fulfilled at its appointed time, and it will not be late.

The heart of the message is found in Habakkuk 2:4. People can be divided into two kinds. First, there are those who are puffed up with pride and desires which are not upright. These obviously include the people Habakkuk has complained about: the ruthless Babylonians and also the violently wicked in his own land. God is certainly not blind to the evil in these people. Yet the description of their being 'puffed up' suggests that their lives are ephemeral, easily deflated and of no lasting substance. It is as if God, with a sweep of his arm, is dismissing them.

There is a second, contrasting kind of people: the righteous who will live by faith (NIV). These people are not easily deflated and will endure. This part of Verse 4 is generally taken as carrying the core message and is quoted in the New Testament (NT) (Rm 1:17; Heb 10:38; Gl 3:11). Rabbis have also recognised that it encapsulates the heart of all the laws in the OT (*b. Makkot* 24a). There are, however, two ambiguous parts of this verse. Will the righteous live by faith or faithfulness? Does that faith or faithfulness belong to the righteous or to

52. Heschel (1969, p. 142) says, 'Justice is meaningless to the great powers of the world [...] God who so loves man that he does not tire of uttering through the prophets his outrage at the wrongs done to man, is now accused by Habakkuk of being responsible for the vitiation of man'.

God? The Hebrew can be translated either way. Surely a person who has faith will choose to live faithfully to God. While faith is never attributed to God, faithfulness always is. One way of expressing this is that a righteous person with faith holds on faithfully, even if by a thread, to God, who is reliably faithful in holding on to that righteous person. The good news is that such a person, unlike the arrogant, whose time is surprisingly quite limited, will not merely survive but really live! Habakkuk and those of his community who choose to live this way have a way of real hope for the future!

The following verse (Hab 2:5) links the subsequent five woe oracles (Hab 2:6–20) back to the first part of the preceding message (Hab 2:4). These judgement oracles function as oracles of assurance to Habakkuk. They deal most obviously with the sins of the Babylonians, but also apply to those in Judah who act similarly. These confirm to Habakkuk that God will, indeed, bring judgement on all those about whom Habakkuk is complaining. They are all among the puffed-up arrogant people who are never at rest and will not endure. Some may puff themselves up through the greedy accumulation of possessions and some through the conquest of other peoples (2:5).⁵³ An implication for Habakkuk is that these people no longer need to be the focus of his attention and anxiety. God has them and their future punishments in hand!

A summary of the five woes is given below (Rochester 2012a, p. 20). In each case, the punishment fits the crime. Habakkuk can safely assume that any other wicked behaviours will similarly be dealt with:

Woe to those who do not respect boundaries and steal from others!

They will be plundered.

Woe to those who build their own futures by trampling on others unjustly!

Their deeds will cry out against them.

Woe to those who get their own way through bloodshed and crime!

They will end up with nothing.

Woe to those who gloat over the shame of others!

They will be exposed.

Woe to those who attribute worth to an idol!

They will be left with lifelessness.

After the third woe oracle there is a pause, as if to call for a refocus of attention to look at a very wide scene that engenders hope. After Habakkuk's

53. It would make sense to emend the MT's reading of 'wine' as the first problem in 2:5 to 'wealth' as it is consistent with the particular behaviours given in this book. Translations vary. Here I agree with Thompson (1993, p. 39).

mental vision has been narrowed by his all-consuming concerns, it needs to be expanded. Habakkuk is drawn towards an image of the earth being filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea – a quotation from Isaiah 11:9. After the fifth woe oracle there is another pause, to assure Habakkuk that the LORD is in his holy temple, his rightful place. The right order is re-established as all the earth is called to be silent before him. Habakkuk's agitations can rest before the LORD of the whole earth, knowing that he will judge everyone rightly.

■ Chapter 3

Chapter 3 is entitled, 'A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet'. There is what seems to be a musical notation על שְׁגִינֹת in the superscription (Hab 3:1), using the same term as in the superscription of Psalm 7, and the chapter ends with 'For the director of music. On my stringed instruments'. These notes indicate that this prayer was subsequently sung by the community in the Jerusalem temple as a psalm.⁵⁴

The prayer begins with the only petition in the book (Hab 3:2). He has heard that true life comes through faith, but in light of what he has heard about the Babylonians, he feels weak in faith. He has been assured that at some time in the future, God will deal rightly with those who act wickedly and will punish them appropriately, but that is still very difficult to grasp. Now, as he addresses YHWH, he remembers what he has heard of the LORD's past, awe-inspiring actions, but he needs the LORD to perform the same kind of actions right now. So he prays, 'Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy' (Hab 3:2).

The inner eyes of Habakkuk's imagination are opened. In his mind, he is transported back to the journey his people made from the Desert to the Promised Land,⁵⁵ led by their holy, glorious and powerful God, introduced in this section (Hab 3:3-15) by his ancient poetic name of Eloah (Hab 3:3). This is a God-inspired visionary journey.⁵⁶ Habakkuk is fully immersed in this powerful experience, as past actions are represented, sometimes

54. FF Bruce (1993, p. 832) is one of many who think Habakkuk may have been a cultic prophet on the staff of the Jerusalem temple. This is because of liturgical indications here and throughout the book. However, Elizabeth Achtemeier (1986, p. 34) disagrees. She notes that cultic forms are used independently of cultic structures, as is also the case in Jeremiah.

55. Teman and Mount Paran are usually taken to places along this route in the area of Edom.

56. This is often called a theophany; however, I prefer to call this a vision. In 3:16, Habakkuk has 'heard', which suggests to some, like Tuell (2017, p. 263), that 'vision' is inappropriate. However, many visual elements justify it being called a vision. There may well also be auditory elements, as can occur in visions. The summary statement about what Habakkuk 'heard' in 3:16 seems to form an inclusion with 3:2, where he opens the prayer by saying he has 'heard' of the LORD's fame. Now, after he has 'seen' much (e.g. 3:7), he has 'heard' in a far fuller sense. Several prophetic books use 'see' and 'hear' interchangeably.

symbolically, as a vivid collage. God's splendour is visible, with rays of light flashing from his hand, the seat of his power. Disease, mountains, and nations tremble and collapse. The dwelling places of ancient enemies are overcome. Streams, rivers, and the sea give way to the LORD's victory march. Sun and moon stand still. The LORD comes out to deliver his people. The wicked leader is crushed and killed!

This overpowering vision, his answer to prayer, leaves Habakkuk physically affected – heart pounding, lips quivering and legs trembling.⁵⁷ His experience has left him in a state of awe in the face of such a mighty God. Habakkuk's personal attitude has also undergone a transformation through it.⁵⁸ Now he says that he is willing to wait again, this time to wait patiently for the day of the invasion. Even though the ravages of war or other destructive forces may leave him with a shortage of food, he has an inner source of joy in the God he now knows is and will be his saviour.

Was this the vision promised in Habakkuk 2:3? Or was the message in Habakkuk 2:4b the entire revelation anticipated? The answer is not clear. Certainly, the core message in Habakkuk 2:4b has echoed down through time as the most important revelation in this book. The vision in Chapter 3 is both a response to Habakkuk's prayer in Habakkuk 3:2 and also an intensely personal visionary experience that enabled Habakkuk to experience the kind of faith spoken of in Habakkuk 2:4.

Habakkuk's assertion that, no matter what difficulties lie ahead, he is choosing to be joyful in God his saviour (Hab 3:17, 18) is in the form of a vow (Roberts 1991, p. 157).⁵⁹ This marks his personal recommitment to God. He had not begun this prayer journey as an unbeliever or a prayer-avoider. Yet there has been significant, even profound, transformation.

The prayer concludes with a statement of settled trust, as is often found at the end of lament psalms, and is linked to the preceding vow. Now, at last, he can say, 'The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights' (3:19). Habakkuk has moved from lament to trust and hope, through his prayers and the responses given by the LORD.

57. Cf. the effects experienced by Ezekiel after his call vision (Ezk 3:14-15).

58. Moseman (2017, p. 261) argues that Habakkuk's transformation becomes a paradigm for our own transformation.

59. Hill does not include this in the vows he observes.

■ Conclusion

Although some books have no explicit mention of prayer, there is evidence that each prophet is sufficiently close to the LORD to hear messages to pass on. It is common for prophets to feel the LORD's emotions and to express them as well as his words. Dialogue between a prophet and the LORD can be initiated by either party and is very candid. Even through great difficulties and even prophetic failures, the LORD is faithful to the relationship. Crying out to God in any time of trouble is heard.

These prophets frequently call people to seek the LORD and to repent, trusting in his compassion and forgiveness. They instruct others to pray, stressing the need for right attitudes (e.g. humility) and ethical behaviours rather than relying on cultic actions, especially if they are dishonest (e.g. unacceptable offerings). However, some people will cry out to the LORD and find that he will not answer them because of their evil deeds or rebellion. Those who habitually pray to idols cannot assume access to the LORD but need to be silent before him.

There is evidence that prayer brings change - a divine response, a personal transformation, or a relenting on the LORD's part. Within this covenant relationship, prayer is understood to be essential.

Prayer in the Psalms: Praise and worship

Fanie Snyman

Department of Old and New Testament Studies,
Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of the Free State,
Bloemfontein, South Africa

■ Introduction

There is little doubt that when reflecting on the theme of worship, the importance of the book of Psalms can hardly be overstated. The very name of the most comprehensive book in the entire Bible is an indication of the important place worship takes in the book, as the book is called ‘*tehillim*’ [תהלים] in Hebrew, a term that can be translated as ‘praise’, ‘worship’ or ‘glory’. Waltke and Houston (2010, p. 41) call the book of Psalms the hymnbook of the Second Temple and Brueggemann (1988, p. 3), the well-known American Old Testament (OT) scholar, noted that the psalms are the central resource for praise in the Bible. It is also noteworthy that the book of Psalms is divided into five parts or ‘books’ (Ps 1–41; 42–72; 73–89; 90–106; 107–150), and each of the five parts or ‘books’ (41:13; 72:18–19; 89:52; 106:48; 146–150) concludes with a doxology of praise. What is also striking is that the last five psalms (Ps 146–150) culminate in a call to praise. To add to this, it is even more striking that these five psalms display a fivefold pairing of a call to praise [הללו], as every psalm starts and ends

How to cite: Snyman, SD 2023, ‘Prayer in the Psalms: Praise and worship’, in AJ Coetsee & FP Viljoen (eds.), *Biblical Theology of prayer in the Old Testament*, Reformed Theology in Africa Series, vol. 12, AOSIS Books, Cape Town, pp. 87–100. <https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2023.BK417.05>

with 'הלל' [הלל] resembling perhaps the five books that make up the book of Psalms as a whole (Ps 146:1, 10; 147:1, 20; 148:1, 14; 149:1, 9; 150:1, 6). The book of Psalms may indeed be seen as the book of praises par excellence (Hutchinson 2005, p. 85). There are also numerous references to activities of worship in the Psalms. Mention is made of festal events (Ps 81:3); visits to the temple (Ps 5:7; 65:4; 122:1-2); processions (Ps 24:7-10; 42:4; 118:26-27); sacrifices brought (Ps 4:5; 51:19; 107:22; 116:17); benedictions (Ps 115:14-15; 121:3-8; 134:3); and the payment of vows (Ps 22:26; 61:8; 65:2; 76:12; 116:14) (Brown 2010, p. 79).

■ Problem statement and methodological considerations

This contribution aims to answer two questions regarding the issue of worship. Firstly, the question to be addressed concerns the meaning of worship. What is the meaning of 'worship' in the Psalms? Secondly, and closely related to the initial question, the aim is to determine what the content of worship would be in the Psalms.

Methodologically, the main verbs used in the book of Psalms to denote 'praise' or 'worship' will be determined and discussed. The research presented in this contribution is informed by the work initiated by Hermann Gunkel, who recognised recurring patterns in the Psalter that led him to identify literary genres [*Gattungen*] in the Psalter. In particular, the genres of the individual and communal lament, as well as individual and communal hymns and songs of thanksgiving, were important in this investigation. Determining the literary genre of a psalm leads to its sociological setting [*Sitz im Leben*]. In this investigation, a cultic setting for the Psalms is supposed. The Psalms were composed by people who experienced difficult times of all sorts. It is, however, not possible to determine an exact historical time for each individual psalm. The investigation was also informed by the canonical shape of the Psalter, suggesting a (late) post-exilic date for the book of Psalms as a whole. It is, for instance, not by chance that Psalm 1 is placed right at the beginning of the book and that the Psalms close with a hymn of praise (Ps 150). Some psalms were intentionally grouped together (Ps 120-134; Ps 15-24), suggesting editorial activity by redactors (Waltke & Houston 2010, pp. 38-40). The research done to determine the content of worship in the Psalms resulted in categorising five movements that have been detected. Individual psalms have been consulted to illustrate and back up the relevant arguments to be made combined with an overview of publications on the subject to link up with recent scholarship on the topic of worship in the Psalms. In the end the relevance of the results of this research for current-day 'praise and worship' practices by churches is suggested.

■ The vocabulary of praise and worship in the Psalter

Scholars have noted that there are several verbs in Hebrew that may be understood or translated as 'praise'. Joubert (2021, p. 1) identified at least ten verbs: 'to shout, sing or rejoice' [רנן], 'to exult'; 'to rejoice' [עליץ], 'to praise or laud' [שבה], 'to be joyful or glad' [שמח], 'sing' [שיר], exaltation, praise' [רומם], 'to sing hymns and praises' [זמר], 'to shout for joy' [צהל], 'to break forth in singing or rejoicing' [פצה] and 'to adorn, beautify or honour and in *hithpael* to be glorified' [פאר], that may be regarded as typifying a kind of a praise act. However, the verbs '*hll*' [הלל], '*ydh*' [ידה] and '*brk*' [ברך] are the most common verbs to denote the act of praise in the Psalms and, in most cases, they take YHWH as their object (Bott 2014, p. 132; Joubert 2021, p. 1). Already in 1988, Zenger (1988, p. 78) noted that the two verbs '*hll*' [הלל] and '*ydh*' [ידה] are characteristic of the entire book of Psalms. Although all three of these verbs are close to one another in terms of meaning, it is also true that each verb has a distinct meaning that differs from the other two. '*Hll*' [הלל] has YHWH or a divine pronoun as object 59 times in the Psalms, '*ydh*' [ידה] has YHWH or a divine pronoun 52 times and '*brk*' [ברך] has YHWH or a divine pronoun 23 times (Bott 2014, p. 134). The praise or worship is ascribed supremely to YHWH (Hutchinson 2005, p. 86).

■ *hll* [הלל]

The most important verb used to describe praise or worship is the verb '*hll*' [הלל]. Although the verb may also have the meaning of 'boast', the focus will be on the verb '*hll*' conveying the meaning of 'praise' or 'worship'. According to Ringgren (1978, p. 406) the root '*hll*' does have the meaning of 'praise', 'extol', 'rejoice,' or 'shout'. Koehler and Baumgartner (eds. 1958, p. 235) describe the meaning of '*hll*' [הלל] as to 'shout in festival joy', to sing or to praise. Persons can be praised for their beauty, actions, or virtues (Joubert 2021, p. 12). Sarah is praised for her beauty (Gn 12:15), while Absalom is also praised for his beauty by the people (1 Sm 14:25). People, in general, may also be praised (Pr 27:2; 28:4). Tyre is praised as a city for its wealth (Ezk 26:17). It is especially God/YHWH who is the object of the verb. In the *pi'el* form '*hll*' has the meaning of 'praise' or 'celebrate'. The hymn is the main type of psalm where '*hll*' [הלל] is found. Westermann (1971a, p. 491) found that in almost two thirds of the times '*hll*' [הלל] is used in the OT, it is found in the book of Psalms, making it the term especially at home in the religious and cultic practices of Israel. Verbs used with '*hll*' in the Psalms indicate that the verb has the meaning of praising YHWH vocally and not silently (Hutchinson 2005, p. 87). The conclusion Joubert (2021, p. 108) came to is that the most prototypical sense of '*hll*' is to praise a deity.

■ *ydh* [יָדָה]

The second most important verb is '*ydh*' [יָדָה]. The verb denotes the meaning 'praise' and 'to give thanks' and even 'to confess openly and freely' (eds. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958, p. 363), and it is especially God who is praised and thanked. It is the connotation of both 'praise' and 'to give thanks' that is noteworthy. To praise God is to thank God, and vice versa, to thank God is also a way of praising God. It is especially the noun '*toda*' [תּוֹדָה] that is found in the book of Psalms as a song of praise. To a certain extent, it may be said that the element of praise coincides with thanksgiving. Joubert (2021, p. 25) notes how an element of joy is often part of expressing one's praise and gratitude to God. The joy with which the believer praises or thanks God is an experience shared together with others (Joubert 2021, p. 24).

■ *brk* [בָּרַךְ]

The third verb to be considered is '*brk*' [בָּרַךְ], and it conveys the meaning of 'bending the knee', 'to kneel down' and, in the *pi'el* form, 'to praise', 'to adore' or 'to bless'. Koehler and Baumgartner (eds. 1958, p. 153) describe the meaning of '*brk*' [בָּרַךְ] as 'to bless somebody or something with fortunate power' or to 'declare that a person is gifted with fortunate power by God who is regarded of the origin of fortunate power'. When a person blesses another person, it means 'a laudatory commendation to the deity for a long life, descendants, prosperity, success, and power' (Scharbert 1977, p. 283). According to Keller (1971, p. 354) the meaning of '*brk*' [בָּרַךְ] can be described as benevolent and health-creating power. God is the ultimate originator of blessings like a wise king, victory in war, the answering of prayers, honouring the promises God made and experiencing miracles. As in the case of '*ydh*' [יָדָה], to bless [בָּרַךְ] is often combined with praise and, therefore, '*brk*' [בָּרַךְ] is used together with '*hl*' [הִלֵּל] as is the case in Psalms 113,1; 117,1; 135:1,3 or with '*ydh*' [יָדָה] as is the case in Psalms 33:2; 105:1; 106:1; 107:1.

■ *הללו יה* in five movements

■ Praise and worship as a movement from the human to the divine

Psalms are prayers in poetic form. The different psalms consist of believing human beings addressing God in prayer. God is addressed mainly as YHWH, but in two cases he is addressed as '*elohim*' [אֱלֹהִים] in Psalm 147:12 and '*el*' [אֵל] in Psalm 150:1, and in a few cases his name [שֵׁם] is praised (Ps 69:31; 74:21; 113:1, 3; 135:1; 145:2; 148:5, 13; 149:3). According to Von Rad (1975, p. 355) the Psalms are Israel's answer to YHWH, while Brueggemann

(1988, p. 1) noted that the human person is constituted in an act of praise. The book of Psalms is the first book in the third and last part of the Hebrew Bible. In the Torah and the prophetic literature, it is all about the words and the mighty acts of deliverance by YHWH, performed in the history of his people. The Psalms, as the introduction to the third part of the Hebrew Bible, record the people's response to the words and deeds of YHWH as recorded in the first and second parts of the TeNaK. The words and deeds of YHWH are listed in a variety of ways. Foster (2008, p. 86) mentioned the following in this regard: YHWH's deliverance and salvation; his faithful love; kingship; sustaining Israel and creation; his just judgement; he relieves burdens and provides food; his majesty, mercy, marvellous deeds and, finally, he subdues people and ruins the wicked.

According to Von Rad (1975, p. 355), the mighty and wonderous acts of YHWH in the history of his people are recorded in the Hexateuch and in the historical works of the Deuteronomist and the Chronicler. Israel responded to these acts of YHWH in praise, in asking questions, and in complaining about suffering.

To praise God presupposes a relationship with the God celebrated in praise. The relationship between God and the individual believer is of course embedded in God's relationship with his people. The preference for YHWH as the way to address God is an indicator that God is addressed as the one who established a relationship between him and the people of Israel. Covenant [ברית] is an important term to describe the relationship between God and his people. Rendtorff (2005, p. 433) regards covenant as 'the most comprehensive and the most theologically weighty term for God's attention to humans in the Hebrew Bible'. The term relates to many different relationships between God and his people. Boda (2017, p. 58) mentions the covenant with Abraham (Gn 15, 17), the people of Israel at Sinai (Ex 19, 24), the priests (Nm 18:19, 25:12-13; Ml 2:4-8) and the royal house (2 Sm 23:5; Jr 33:21; Ps 89:34, 132:12). It is interesting to note that the Hebrew term for covenant [ברית] is found only in singular form in the OT. This is so that the different relationships God entered into do not indicate different covenants with different groups but should instead be understood as aspects of a single covenant. The covenant itself constitutes the relationship; it is the term that describes the relationship and gives structure to the relationship (Boda 2017, p. 62). Related to the idea of a covenant is the so-called covenant formula: 'I will be your God and you shall be my people' (Lv 26:12). This expression makes it clear that God and his people are bound together in a reciprocal relationship where God committed himself to be the (only) God of Israel and that Israel is supposed to be his obedient people. Boda (2017, p. 56) remarks that this theological tradition reflected in the covenant formula highlights the relational identity of YHWH and his people.

The covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob makes it clear that individuals are included in the covenant with God. This relationship between God and the believing human being, in its turn, presupposes a dialogical relationship. God always initiates the relationship, but in the covenant relationship the people become a partner. The many first-person singular forms used in the Psalms are indicative of how important the individual human person is in this dialogical relationship with God. To praise God is to act upon who God is and what God did. God is worshipped for who he is in all his power, love, faithfulness, righteousness, justice, compassion and mercy. God is worshipped for his mighty acts of deliverance in the history of his people. He is the God who created everything (Ps 8, 19); revealed himself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; delivered his people from Egypt; brought them through the wilderness; revealed the Torah to his people (Ps 1, 19, 119); and led them into the promised land (Ps 105, 106, 107). It is because YHWH has these qualities and that his deeds of deliverance can be verified in history that believers may trust him for yet another act of deliverance. When we praise God, we yield, submit and abandon ourselves in trust and gratitude to the one to whom we belong (Brueggemann 1988, p. 1). To worship God is 'an acknowledgement that one's human life is rooted elsewhere and not in itself' (Brueggemann 2014, p. 517). To worship God is to turn away from the self and to surrender to God, who may be trusted. Communion with God is understood as a dialectical and personal relationship that is dynamic and responsive (Gillingham 1987, p. 207). Words of praise are spoken on Earth by human beings, but it is addressed to God in Heaven (Brueggemann 1988, p. 3). The presence of God in Heaven is experienced in the temple or sanctuary. In this sense, to praise God represents a movement from the human to the divine, and the temple as God's earthly abode is the best place to experience just that.

Keel (1997, p. 231) emphasises the important aspect of YHWH's exclusivity in the act of praising him. When YHWH is celebrated and praised for who he is and what he did, there is sometimes also a counter and contrasting image with the lifeless idols (Ps 135:14-15). The idols of other and often stronger nations provide an alternative to YHWH and, therefore, when praising this God, 'the psalmist must declare himself for YHWH's exclusivity'. To praise God means to devote oneself to YHWH alone, and this exclusive devotion to God means a renunciation of other gods.

Psalm 77 may serve as an example to illustrate this first movement. The first six verses of the psalm consist of a personal complaint of someone who is in distress. This serious condition prompted him to ask questions about God in the following verses (vv. 7-9): Has YHWH rejected him? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he withheld his compassion? In the last part of the psalm (vv. 11-15), there is a dramatic shift in the focus of the psalm away from the 'I' and onto God, where the poet recalls the 'the deeds

of the LORD' and the 'wonders of old' (v. 11). As Brueggemann (1988, p. 138) observes, God has now become the centre of the psalmist's rhetoric. A movement from the human to the divine has taken place.

■ Praise and worship as a movement from lament to praise

It is a characteristic trait found in many psalms that a psalm commences with a lament but then ends in praise and worship. Westermann (1965, p. 75) put it aptly when he said that there is almost no such thing as mere lament and petition. The cry to God cannot be mere lament; it is always underway from supplication to praise. The lament uttered to God is based on the firm belief that God will act and enter into the believer's distress, discomfort and pain and bring a decisive change in the life of the believer. Praise arises in the context of lament (Brueggemann 1988, p. 140), and once the lament is voiced, there is the possibility that lament may be transformed into praise and worship. What probably happened was that a lament or complaint originated in a private setting but was then incorporated into a public liturgy (Gillingham 1987, p. 236).

Psalm 13 exemplifies this move from lament to praise – a pattern often found in the structure of the psalms of lamentation (Human 2021, p. 270). Briefly summarised, Psalm 13 consists of a call to God (vv. 1–2), a lament (vv. 2–3), followed by a prayer (vv. 4–5), a declaration of trust (v. 6a) and, finally, a promise of praise as thanksgiving (v. 6b) (Human 2021, p. 274). The movement from complaint to praise can be clearly detected in the psalm. Human's (2021, p. 281) conclusion is that Psalm 13 describes a basic life experience of a YHWH-believer – how to move from complaint to praise. This movement from complaint to praise is found in many other Psalms as well (Ps 7; 18; 22; 41; 59, and many more). There is also a kind of logic at work in the movement from lament to praise. It is the plight of the one who prays that gave rise to the lament. When difficult times are the experience of people, one would expect lament. Once YHWH answered the prayers of those afflicted, the logical response is praise.

This is also true for the book of Psalms as a whole. More psalms of lament are found earlier in the book of Psalms, and conversely, more psalms of praise are found later in the book, culminating in the last five psalms proclaiming praise to YHWH. To prove this point, it is interesting to note that the verb *'hll'* occurs sixteen times in books I–IV of the Psalms and no less than 39 times in book V of the Psalms. The verb *'ydh'* [יִדַּה] is also found most frequently (27 times) in the fifth book of the Psalms (Joubert 2021, p. 109). Zenger (1988) made the important observation that especially the fifth book of the Psalms does not present a naïve, escapist praise of God; instead, one is being called to praise the God who rescues in the midst of

affliction and suffering. Foster (2008, p. 88) also detected this move from lament to praise in the book of Psalms when he stated that the final psalms demand that those reading/hearing the Psalms move beyond the earlier period of supplication to affirm that YHWH indeed delivers, reigns, proves faithful and displays majesty. 'The Psalms move from prayers that seek YHWH's deliverance to proclamations that affirms that YHWH does indeed deliver' (Foster 2008, p. 88). It is quite significant that even though there are more psalms of lament than psalms of praise, the book of Psalms is nevertheless called '*tehillim*' [תהלים], the book of praise. Theologically speaking, this is important. Janowski (2010, p. 290) remarks that to praise God is a basic conviction in theology, and according to an OT understanding of what it is to be a human being, to praise God is the typical way of being human. To praise God relativises the importance of being a human being and is a stark reminder of God in relationship with people where he constantly turns to people to deliver them (Janowski 2010, p. 291).

■ Praise and worship as a movement from the private to the public and beyond

In scholarly literature, a distinction is made between declarative and descriptive psalms. Declarative psalms refer to the individual believer proclaiming what God did in their lives. Descriptive psalms refer to the public domain, where God's characteristics and acts in the history of his people and the world are stated. It often happens that the declarative and descriptive aspects are integrated into one psalm so that both aspects are present. What started as an individual lament moves to a public proclamation of what YHWH did in the life of the believer, and eventually, the declarative and descriptive dimensions merge in one psalm.

Individuals do have a place in the Psalms (Ps 7; 18). In fact, the verb '*hll*' [הלל] occurs ten times in the first-person singular; '*ydh*' [ידה] occurs 26 times; and '*brk*' [ברך] six times (Bott 2014, p. 137). The proper names (Dawid, Asaph, Moses, Solomon, Heman and Ethan) occurring in the headings of the Psalms also serve to prove that individuals do play an important role in the prayers recorded in the Psalter. In one instance, it is even said that the psalmist will praise God with singing lips, remembering YHWH from his bed (Ps 63:5-6).

Praise, however, is brought to YHWH by a group of believers. This is seen by the very word used to call people to praise, '*hallelu*' [הללו], which in Hebrew is a verb in the plural imperative form, assuming a gathered group of people. Psalm 116 may serve as an apt example to illustrate the movement from the private to the public. Psalm 116 commences with a declaration of the love the poet has for YHWH. The poet may make this declaration of love because YHWH listened to his prayers when he was in great danger,

even up to the brink of death. First-person singular forms abound in the first four verses of the psalm. The deliverance 'from death' (v. 8) the poet experienced compelled him to a sense of sincere gratitude to YHWH. His wish is to express his gratitude 'in the presence of all his people', according to Verses 13-18, and 'in the courts of the house of the LORD' in Jerusalem, according to the last verse of the psalm. The Psalm started off on a personal note, recalling a time of distress and hardship in his life, but culminated in a thank-offering brought to YHWH in the presence of other believers in the temple.

According to Gillingham (1987, p. 236), the most obvious context for psalms of praise and thanksgiving is within the presence of the cultic community. Hutchinson (2005, p. 88) agrees with the remark that the most appropriate locus of praise is a congregational setting. Joubert (2021, p. 96) came to the same conclusion when he stated that praising God is primarily a communal activity performed in the sanctuary. YHWH is praised in the presence of and together with co-believers. The praise for YHWH in the temple together with co-believers assumes an aspect of testimony before an attendant audience (Gillingham 1987, p. 236). What the individual believers experienced in their personal lives is now proclaimed where fellow believers come together as a testimony to what YHWH did to come to their rescue. The testimony uttered in the form of praise strengthens the faith and trust of the people in God. The experience of the individual becomes the experience of the community.

YHWH is praised by the people of God in the temple with a variety of musical instruments. Psalm 150 listed trumpets, harps, lutes, tambourines, strings, pipe or flute and cymbals. To dance is part of praising YHWH, according to Psalm 149:3 and Psalm 150:4. To sing a song is part of praising God (Ps 69:31; 95:1; 96:1-2).

To praise God is not restricted to either the people of God or the sanctuary. The praise brought to God moves even beyond the public sphere to include other foreign nations and the entire created order. In Psalm 47, all the nations are summoned to 'shout to God with cries of joy' (v. 1) because YHWH is the 'great King over all Earth' (v. 2). In Psalm 96, 'all Earth' is called upon to sing a new song to YHWH and to praise [ברכו] his name. The same idea is found in Psalm 117. The people called upon to praise YHWH are the foreign nations [גוים האמים]; it is implied that they are the ones who should praise and extol him because of his love for and faithfulness to the people of Israel. In Psalm 148, everything 'from the heavens' and 'in the heights' (Ps 148:1) is called upon to praise YHWH, and in the second part of the same psalm, inanimate entities from the earth like the sun, moon, stars and clouds are likewise called to render praise to YHWH (Ps 148:7-9) together with 'wild animals, cattle, small creatures, and flying birds' (Ps 148:10). Psalm 29 moves beyond even the created world to

include the 'mighty ones', or, more correctly, 'the sons of God' [בני אלים]. They are called upon to give glory and strength to YHWH and to worship him in the splendour of his holiness (vv. 1-2). These 'sons of God' are no ordinary human beings but rather heavenly beings beyond the earthly world (Foster 2008, p. 77). In Psalm 148:2, 'all his angels' together with 'all his (heavenly) hosts' are called to praise YHWH.

The act of worship creates a world different from the peril of the world the believer has been rescued from (Brueggemann 1988, p. 26). Once it is granted that the act of worship creates a world, it follows that this created world is also polemical (Brueggemann 1988, p. 27). A world of praise and thanksgiving, different from the world of pain and peril, resists and overcomes the world of distress. In many psalms, this movement from the private to the public and even beyond can be traced.

■ Praise and worship as a movement from the then (past) to the now (present)

Worship can also be seen as a re-enactment or a re-experiencing of deliverance in the past. To be able to re-experience God's graceful deeds of the past, one has to remember them. So decisive is the power of memory that hymns combine the call to praise with a call to remember. Psalm 105 may serve as an apt example where the call to worship and praise God is followed by a call to 'remember the wonderful works he has done' (Ps 105:6). Psalm 81 may serve as another example where there is a movement from the past to the present. Psalm 81 recalls the deliverance from Egypt. The people called upon YHWH in their distress and they were rescued (Ps 81:7). YHWH is indeed the God who brought them out of Egypt (Ps 81:10). In the present, this may happen again, if only the people would listen to YHWH and follow his ways (Ps 81:13-14). YHWH is accepted as the creator of Heaven and Earth, and that calls for the praise of YHWH.

Prinsloo (2021, p. 417) detected a 'suggestion of spatial movement and arrival at a destination' in Psalm 107. Initially, the redeemed people were wandering around in the wilderness (Ps 107:4-9). Then, YHWH led them to a city where they could settle – a reference to Jerusalem. Prinsloo's (2021, p. 417) conclusion is that the psalm suggests a horizontal journey from far to near, from being off-centre to arriving in Jerusalem, the centre of the universe. A movement from the past (the wandering in the wilderness) to the present (being in Jerusalem) took place.

Reading the Psalms is a hermeneutical exercise where the 'then' of the psalm that happened long ago is appropriated in the 'now' of the current situation of the reader. Zenger (1988, p. 101) alluded to this hermeneutics at work with the statement that the psalms are the prayers and songs through

which poor, persecuted Israel experiences salvation. Waltke and Houston (2010, p. 40) noted how the Psalms shaped the private worship and prayer of Jewish people's. Echoes of Psalm 51 were found in a fragmentary manuscript from Qumran Cave 4. What is termed here as a movement from the then (past) to the now (present) Brueggemann (2014, p. 526) calls memory and hope. The memory of the past serves as an antidote for hopelessness in the present. The memory of God's power and fidelity in the past that resulted in the deliverance from Egypt creates an anticipation that the same may happen in the present. The God who delivered his people once will do so again in the present time. Brueggemann (2014, p. 526) shows that the memory of what happened in the past extends beyond the present, even into the future of the community. Psalm 22:31 foresees a time when the righteousness of YHWH will be made known to a people yet unborn. According to Psalm 78:4-8, the praiseworthy deeds of YHWH will be told to a future generation and even to the children yet to be born, who in turn will tell their children and they will put their trust in him. Zenger (1988, p. 101) remarked that the Psalms as praise in the midst of the fire of history are, in particular, the prayers that give Israel hope and a home.

The Psalms were appropriated again in the believing community, and this is a process that repeated itself countless times up to today. The 'then' of the Psalms becomes the 'now' of the current believer. When current believers pray and sing the psalms of lament, they do so while knowing beforehand that lament eventually turned into praise. Even the laments can therefore be prayed and sung in the expectation of the deliverance that will follow. Praise will be the result of deliverance.

■ Praise and worship as a movement from death to life

Death as the end of life is a stark reality in the Psalms. Even the most powerful people, like the kings, cannot escape death but suffer from the frailty of all humankind (Van Rooy 2021, p. 133). Psalmists often recall experiences where they regarded themselves to be in life-threatening situations. The well-known Psalm 23 ('even though I walk through the darkest valley'; v. 4) makes one think of the ever-present threat of death (Gillingham 1978, p. 167). Psalm 107:18 speaks of a situation where the people 'drew near to the gates of death' but were saved by YHWH from their distress (v. 19) and brought into YHWH's presence where the people will rejoice in thanksgiving (Prinsloo 2021, p. 418). Several Psalms testify to a situation where either individuals or the people were on the brink of death but prevailed and were restored to life again. In Psalm 9:13, the psalmist proclaims: 'You are the one who lifts me up from the gates of death' (NRSV). In Psalm 18:5, the psalmist complains that 'snares of death

confronted me', but then in a mighty theophany YHWH came down and he was delivered from enemies that were too mighty for him (Ps 18:17). Because of the right hand of YHWH, the psalmist will not die but live 'to recount the deeds of the LORD' (Ps 118:16-17).

The predominant understanding of life by the psalmists is in literal, physical, this-worldly terms (Gillingham 1978, p. 186). Life is lived in the land of the living [אַרְצֵי חַיִּים], according to Psalms 27:13 ('I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living') and 142:5 ('you are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living'). Therefore, not only enemies but also physical illness threaten one's life. Life is fragile and, therefore, also precious. Death threatens life, and consequently, death is seen as an enemy. When death is overcome and life is restored, it is reason to praise God (Ps 30; 40; 86; 116; 138).

Von Rad (1975, p. 370) stated that praising and not praising stand over against one another like life and death: praise becomes the most elementary token of life that exists - from generation to generation, the hymns of the thanksgiving community are passed on (Ps 145:4-7). Jeremias (2004, p. 99) echoes this point of view when he says that praise becomes the basis of any life. People who do not worship God lose their complete life.

To praise God is something only the living can do. When a psalmist has the experience of being close to death, either by the hand of an enemy or because of illness, praise is the appropriate response the one who has been restored to life again can and should display. Van Rooy (2021, p. 141) is correct when he observes that life and death are frequently juxtaposed in the Psalms, but there is more to it. There is also a deliberate movement from death to life. Deliverance from death and restoration to life are important motivations for bringing praise to YHWH. This movement from death to life, resulting in praise for God, is illustrated in Psalm 116. The psalm commences by lamenting the dire situation of the psalmist: 'The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me' (v. 3). The movement from death to life is recorded in Verses 8-9: 'For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling. I walk before the LORD in the land of the living'. This experience of being rescued from death and restored to life resulted in praise and thanksgiving in the temple in the presence of fellow believers: 'I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the LORD' (v. 17). The psalm concluded with the familiar 'Praise the LORD' [הַלְלוּ יְהוָה] in Verse 19.

■ Conclusion

Brueggemann (1988, p. 1) states it aptly when he says that praise is both a human need and a delight. When we praise God, it represents a turn to him,

and in our return to God we find our deepest joy (Brueggemann 1988, p. 1). Present-day believers continue to praise and worship God. In some church denominations, 'praise and worship' became a standard item in the liturgy followed. The five movements suggested are also valid for present-day praise and worship practices in churches.

It remains important to keep in mind that worship represents a movement from the human to the divine. Singing songs of worship is not done for the sake of singing itself – it is a way of addressing God in prayer. Worship is worshipping God. Current praise and worship services tend to have a one-sided emphasis on the 'praise' and less on lament. Westermann (1994, p. 25) is of the opinion that 'lament has been totally excluded from man's relationship with God, with the result that it has completely disappeared above all from prayer and worship'. Brueggemann (2003, p. 289) noted how lament has largely been lost in the practice of the church, with the result that the church even abandoned the lament Psalm. Christian communities of faith can benefit from a renewed discovery of the value of communal lament. The Psalms demonstrated that life is not only about praising God. To live life *coram Deo* also has the meaning of lamenting the personal and communal experiences of disaster, death, sin, hardship and illness. Present-day believers have the added advantage when reading the psalms of lament that lament turns to praise. Believers may lament while expecting deliverance so that they may praise God once again. Especially in a time of the devastating effects of the worldwide coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, where so many people were affected in so many ways, the church will do good to rediscover lament as part of its liturgical practice. Brueggemann (2003, p. 290) rightly stated that the recovery of the psalms of complaint, protest and lament is a major enterprise in valuing the full spectrum of Israel's rhetoric faith. Sincere lament may then lead to even more jubilant praise.

A personal outpouring of lament turning to praise eventually found its way to the public sphere. Others could recognise their own lament turning to praise in the praise and worship of the individual. The believing community could identify with the lament and the praise of an individual member of the community. The result of this process of moving from the private to the public is a faith-strengthening exercise. What happened to the individual believer now becomes the experience of a faith community. Faith in God presupposes a private and personal relationship with God. However, faith is practised together with and in the community of fellow believers. Personal faith cannot be privatised. The praise the individual brings to the community is a testimony of what God did. The testimony of what God did in the life of the individual believer is a testimony that needs to go beyond the borders of only the faith community. What God did cannot be restricted to only the circle of believers. God is the universal

God, creator of Heaven and Earth, and therefore the testimony of his deeds of redemption should go beyond the believing community.

Worship may also be seen as a re-enactment of salvation. Christian believers re-live the redemption brought about by Jesus Christ. The same gospel is proclaimed in worship services Sunday after Sunday. The focus of praise and worship is on God and what he did in the history of his people as well as in the history of individual believers. The 'then' of the past becomes the 'now' of the present. By taking part in the singing, praising God, a fusion of the past and the present takes place. The salvation accomplished by Christ in the past once again becomes our salvation in the present. The COVID-19 pandemic made us aware of our vulnerability as human beings. Most - if not all - of us have been affected by the devastating effects of the pandemic. The Psalms are a reflection on the reality of death while living our lives. Time and again, psalmists could testify of a situation where their very lives were at stake, either because of enemies or because of illness, but then they were returned to life by the grace of God. Many present-day believers could identify with this movement from death to life.

To praise God is a way of life for the OT believer, as it is something that they will do 'all my life [...] as long as I live' (Ps 146:2). The Psalms are testimony to the fact that worship belongs to the essence of being a believer in OT times. To live is to praise God, and to praise God is to live life.

Prayer in the Psalms: Petition, intercession and lament

Lekgetho H Moretsi

Research Focus Area: Ancient Texts: Text, Context, and Reception,
Faculty of Theology, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa

■ Introduction

Prayer is an integral part of Israel's life, and this is the case for Christians today. In the Psalms, Israel sang hymns of praise to God, cried against God, cried out to God for help and deliverance, invoked the wrath of God upon their enemies and celebrated the sovereignty of God over creation.

It is the conviction of the author that psalms can be used as words to God in prayer, be it an individual or community prayer, private or public worship, pastoral counselling, or care when praying for or with others. The psalms encourage and invite us to be actively involved in prayer rather than just using them as words of prayer. The prayer invitation of the psalmist is not only the invitation by the psalmist, but it is also put forward as coming out of God's mouth: 'Call on me in the day of trouble', the LORD says, 'I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me' (Ps 50:15).

The psalms of lament display an image of a person in distress. In addition, these psalms express the desire of the psalmist for God

How to cite: Moretsi, LH 2023, 'Prayer in the Psalms: Petition, intercession, and lament', in AJ Coetsee & FP Viljoen (eds.), *Biblical Theology of prayer in the Old Testament*, Reformed Theology in Africa Series, vol. 12, AOSIS Books, Cape Town, pp. 101-112. <https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2023.BK417.06>

to intervene. The purpose of this chapter is to investigate how psalms of petition, intercession and lament can be used as prayers and what they meant within their original Old Testament (OT) context. Psalms 13 and 22 will receive special attention.

■ Petition

From the outset, it is vital to note that it is a long-known tradition to refer to certain or particular psalms in the OT Psalter as psalms of complaint (cf. Aejmelaeus 1986, p. 9). There are two types of psalms of complaint, namely, the individual complaint and the communal complaint (Gunkel 1977, p. xli-li; cf. Aejmelaeus 1986, p. 9). The Psalms have various genres resulting from the complaint each one addresses. 'Although the element of complaint constitutes the greater part of a psalm, the individual complaint psalms are characteristically prayer psalms' (Aejmelaeus 1986, p. 10). It is vital to note that the OT Psalter does not in any way contain complaints as distinct or different from prayer.

Here, complaint is defined 'as a description of misery and suffering with its standard [...] and metaphors, without necessarily [...] mentioning God' (Aejmelaeus & Schmidt 1986). Hardship or suffering in this world is a universal phenomenon from which God's children are not immune. Suffering is at times of such nature that one lacks words to describe it, let alone to put it into words of prayer. On the other hand, prayer is seen in its entirety as a speech directed to God, especially with regard to a request, a plea or an appeal to him.

The psalms of petition were seen as models of prayer, a norm of what could be uttered to God in prayer. One other distinct feature in the Psalms through which prayer, complaints and laments are characterised is the affirmation of confidence and trust in God. An appeal to God made in prayer and confidence portrayed in him seem to form the foundation or the framework through which the complaint is taken as acceptable. The element of prayer in psalms of petition may, therefore, justifiably be regarded as suitable for a more detailed formal analysis.

The petition is the most important part of the lament song. In essence, it is the heart of the lament genre, which is understandable since the efforts of the praying are designed to receive something from God (cf. Gunkel 1998, p. 158). The form in which the petition is given is the imperative. It is worth noting that the aim of the lament song is to obtain something from YHWH. To achieve this goal, the petitioner strives to move the heart of God with every little thing they utter.

The investigation is on psalms of petition, intercession and lament, but not on psalms in general. Attention is thus paid to the characterisation of

the form of one element as well as its function in its context. An example of a psalm of petition (a request) is (cf. Deverell 2007):

Psalm 22:11; 19–21

Do not be far from me,
 For trouble is near
 And there is no one to help. [...]
 But you, O LORD, be not far off;
 O my Strength, come quickly to help me.
 Deliver my life from the sword,
 My precious life from the power of the dogs.
 Rescue me from the mouth of the lions.
 Save me from the horns of the wild oxen. (p. 358)

The laments and complaints, as tabled in Verses 1–10, which are on two occasions interrupted by the expression of the trust the psalmist has in God (vv. 3–5 and 9–10), end in a plea or a request from the psalmist in Verse 11. In this petition, the psalmist shows that there is no helper, except God, to help in the face of the distress [צרה] at hand. He declares that only YHWH can rescue him from the pending disaster.

At the height of the psalmist's deepest need, the petition (v. 11) that YHWH may not be far away is repeated. In addition, the psalmist asks that YHWH hurry to help him. The petition then extends to three verses (vv. 19–21). Kraus (1993a, p. 298) argues that *חרב* [sword] is probably a symbol of the power of death (Ps 37:14), while *כלב* [dog] points to Verse 16. The psalmist, in this lament, is crying out to YHWH to come to his rescue from the evil forces that divide him from God. *אריה* [lion] in Verse 21 points to Verse 13. The psalmist pleads in this petition for God's presence in his predicament.

The lament part of Psalm 22 deeply describes and measures the depth of the psalmist's feeling of being abandoned by God. The psalmist faced death, but what frustrated and scared him most was that he felt abandoned and forsaken by God as well. Verses 1–2 fully describe his view of the lack of an answer to his constant prayer, and this resulted in him feeling that help is far away. In his agony and distress, the psalmist has appealed for help to the one he views as LORD and on whom he depends entirely. It is unfortunate that the cries of deep agony experienced were met with alienation and silence from God (cf. v. 2). To make matters worse for the psalmist, the mockery and taunting of his enemies point out God's lack of action, let alone answers (vv. 7–8)! The metaphor employed by the psalmist of his enemies surrounding him like wild animals, ready to devour him in his defenceless condition, clearly portrays the picture of his condition.

It is striking to note how the petitioner, in his predicament, declares God's holiness in Verse 4. God's holiness is the reason for his declaration of his trust in the LORD, based on what God did previously (cf. vv. 4–5). The experience of abandonment was very strange in relation to what God did for his ancestors (v. 4). In his agony, the psalmist cried with trust to the LORD. The last part of this psalm turns to thanksgiving and provides a key with which to better understand the lament itself. What is striking in this psalm is for the psalmist to recognise God's deliverance from the crisis at hand. What is further striking in this prayer of lament is for the psalmist, in his deep distress, to recognise God's response and action in the manner God did. Initially, the psalmist declares that he is surrounded by enemies, but at the end of this psalm he finds himself amid the faithful, praising the one who is on the throne with them. For God to deliver the psalmist in his distress is an indication that the petition was answered, and that is the indication that the LORD has restored his presence in the life of the psalmist. This lament psalm is an aid to those who undergo suffering and can use these words as prayer. For God to have delivered and rescued the psalmist is an indication that silence may indeed be perceived, but it is just temporal and not permanent. This psalm provides the certainty that God knows, hears and sees his children in distress and answers their cries. Nobody enjoys trauma or suffering, but this lament psalm provides the comfort that the suffering is not eternal, as God provides a solution in the long run.

■ Examples of psalms of petition

The following are examples of psalms of petition:

- Psalms 4, 10, 13 and 17 (plea for deliverance from enemies)
- Petitions in Psalm 22 are found in Verses 11 and 19–21 and are pleas for deliverance from suffering
- Psalm 25 (prayer for guidance and deliverance)
- Psalm 28 (*prayer for help*)
- Psalm 39 (prayer for wisdom and for forgiveness)
- Psalm 42 (longing for God and God's help)
- Psalm 43 (prayer in times of difficulties)
- Psalm 44 (a national lament and prayer for assistance)
- Psalm 51 (prayer for cleansing and forgiveness)
- Psalm 70 (prayer for rescue from enemies)
- Psalm 82 (a plea for justice)
- Psalm 85 (prayer for the restoration of God's favour)
- Psalm 130 (prayer/waiting for redemption)
- Psalm 143 (prayer to be delivered from enemies).

Not all these psalms will receive discussion in this chapter. A good example of a prayer of petition is Psalm 13, which is subsequently discussed.

■ Psalm 13

It is noteworthy that the lament or cry of Psalm 22 questions why God has abandoned the psalmist, while the lament of Psalm 13 inquires ‘for how long’ God will ignore the psalmist. The aim of this psalm is to inquire about the duration of ignorance or silence. Psalm 13 is a lament to the LORD regarding deliverance from a deadly sickness that threatens to be fatal (cf. v. 3). If David is the (actual) author of Psalm 13, this sickness creates a long-awaited opportunity for his enemies to vent their animosity.

The question, regarding the duration of waiting, may come because of the ailment or some condition that may have threatened to take the life of the psalmist. In Verses 1–2, the question of duration is asked four times, beginning with עַד־אֵנָה as an indication that the condition has been there for a period. What one deduces from these two verses is that the condition has been an ongoing matter. Because of this lengthy condition, the psalmist has lost hope of getting healed, as God has deserted him. According to Kraus (1993a, p. 214), the desperate questions עַד־אֵנָה are witnesses to the unbearable afflictions that the petitioner has had to suffer for a long time. YHWH is often addressed in this type of psalm (cf. Ps 6:3; 35:17; 74:10; 79:5; 94:3; 80:4). Psalm 13 emphasises that he whom the LORD forsook has suffered this unbearable affliction.

Within these burning עַד־אֵנָה questions are not only signs of a stormy impatience deduced, but also signs of great patience, which never ceased to call on YHWH while suffering for a long time (cf. Kraus 1993a, p. 215). Despite the long wait, the psalmist built courage and continued to trust that YHWH would eventually deliver him; hence, he continued calling unto YHWH. The long wait did not make him lose hope. The most devastating agony dealt with in the lament in Psalm 22 is the state of being forsaken by God (Ps 22:1). Being forsaken by God means God’s absence. In the OT, פָּנִים [‘face’ or ‘countenance’] is the manner through which YHWH makes himself known. Being forsaken refers to the absence of God; that is, God hid his countenance. The absence of God’s countenance means that man is forsaken. When forsaken by God, man is alone with his עֲצוּת (v. 2). Where God’s presence is absent, man torments himself and finds no meaning in life. The presence of God indicates blessings and prosperity, while God’s absence indicates fear and death (Dt 28). In the context of Psalm 13, it is as if the psalmist is declaring that God has not shown his face, thus declaring that God’s face shows his favour (cf. Nm 6:25, ‘The LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace’). The Hebrew for peace is שָׁלוֹם. Here (Nm 6:26), it is seen in its most expressive fullness – not the absence of suffering or hardship, but a positive state of rightness and well-being. It is only God who can provide such peace (Jn 14:27). The psalmist is showing great difficulty regarding what he knows and what is happening around him. It is

striking how in vv. 3–4 the questions and complaints develop into pleas. It is amazing that the petitioner who feels that he has been ‘forgotten’ by God (v. 1) now prays for God’s sympathy and attention (cf. Kraus 1993a, p. 215). The way in which the psalmist masters and handles the nature of the crisis he is facing is striking. He recognises the unity of a person’s well-being in his physical, spiritual and emotional being of self; that is, focusing on the person in totality rather than a specific aspect of their life. The psalmist pays attention to himself and deals with the struggle within himself. He has come to the realisation that the death of the body outside God’s presence meant being cut off completely from God – hence, he pleads for salvation. The prayer of this psalm is the quest to be re-united with God in his favour since he trusts in God and finds solace and comfort in the salvation that God provides. The psalmist focuses on the fact that the attention and the answer of YHWH turn into a rescuing act. As Kraus (1993a, p. 216) states, the expression of trust beginning with וַאֲנִי, has the force of an affirmation: ‘even though everything points to death and the end, I trust in your goodness’. The psalmist pleads for God’s presence, and that is the only answer for his predicament; that is, God making his presence known.

■ Intercession

Bonhoeffer (1970, p. 16) states that intercessory prayer is the purifying bath into which the individual and the fellowship must enter every day. Prayer originates from a relationship with God that is fully and warmly personal (cf. Clements-Jewery 2005, p. 4). Prayer is an aspect in which the worshipper should grow and become mature. Is intercessory prayer necessary? Prayer is necessary and must be viewed as a personal partnership that is not only between God and the one who is praying but also between God and the people being prayed for (cf. Clements-Jewery 2005, p. 6). Intercessory prayer thus promotes the personal nature created between God and the people being prayed for.

Throughout the OT we find and learn of various intercessory prayers, for example, in the Pentateuch in Genesis 18, with intercession by Abraham on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah, Moses’ three intercessions on the Mountain of God (Ex 17:8–13; cf. firstly, in Ex 32:7–14, secondly in Ex 23:30–35, and thirdly in Ex 33:12–23) on behalf of the people of Israel. Intercession is to demonstrate the act of love, thus moving attention in prayer from our own needs and focusing on the needs and concerns of others. Intercessory prayer can be classified as selfless prayer or even as self-giving prayer. In times such as this, worsened by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, people are desperately in need of help that we can give them. Intercessory prayer is priestly ministry, and this is what we as believers can do.

■ Examples of intercessory prayers

In the quest to find help, the psalmist in Psalm 25 turns to YHWH and confesses his trust (Ps 25:15):

Redeem Israel, O God,
From all their troubles. (v. 22)

In this verse a reference is made to the community of Israel. Here a prayer of redemption and freedom or liberation is made for the whole Israel as the nation of God. This verse is a concluding prayer on behalf of all God's people. All the legitimate concerns in this prayer are all in the honour of God's name (Ps 25:11). Psalm 122 reads:

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
'May those who love you be secure.' (v. 6)

Here the psalmist is requesting peace and prosperity for the inhabitants through prayer on behalf of the community in Jerusalem. Peace and prosperity or well-being do not come automatically in life; hence, the intercession for the people of Jerusalem. The psalmist is here, through prayer, requesting peace that would result from the exercise of justice, that would not only bring forth an end to social turmoil but also bring about prosperity on all levels (cf. Ps 72:1-7; Futato et al. 2009, p. 123). The psalmist is here not only interceding on behalf of the community for peace but also for prosperity on behalf of others.

■ Lament

The cry of distress directed to God by his children is depicted or illustrated from the Pentateuch through to the Prophets, and the New Testament (NT) also bears witness to this. God provides a solution to this cry of distress. Thus, in both OT and NT, lament is a very natural part of human life. In the Psalter, it is a vital and inescapable component of worship and of the language of worship (Westermann 1974, p. 25). The OT, from the beginning to the end, depicts 'the cry or call of distress,' the 'cry out of depths' – in other words, the lament is an inevitable part that defines what takes place between God and man (cf. Westermann 1974, p. 22). The attention in this study is not on lament throughout the OT but specifically on the Psalter. The Book of the Psalter (150 psalms) contains 28% of the psalms of lament, thus placing them at the centre of the history of the lament of the nation and the lament of the individual. Both the nation or community and individual psalms of lament can be differentiated through their characteristic form – the former are very short laments while the latter are prose prayers – resulting from the worship tradition of psalms of lament. Suffering or hardship is a well-known phenomenon throughout the world and is

experienced globally. Bonhoeffer (1982, p. 16) argues that the Psalter has a wealth of things to teach us about how we should bring the manifold sufferings that afflict us in this world before God. He further makes references to serious illness, the depths of abandonment by God and men, threats, persecution, imprisonment and every conceivable necessity or need – the psalms know them all (Ps 13; 31; 35; 41; 44; 54; 55; 56; 61; 74; 79; 86; 88; 102; 105; etc.).

These are poems and songs that contain a fixed structure. According to Westermann (1974, p. 26), the structure of the psalms of lament is an address (an introductory petition), a lamentation, a turning to God (confession of trust), a petition or a vow of praise. The structure merely shows what is significant to the psalm of lament, but not the distinction between communal and individual laments. The theological importance of the role the structure plays is to indicate an internal transition; hence, not even one of the psalms of lament, neither a communal nor an individual psalm, stops with lamentation. The lamentation or cry on its own does not have a meaning in or of itself. It is very important to note that the lamentation focuses rather on the removal of the suffering itself than on one's own suffering or self-pity. The lament makes an appeal or request to the one who can root out suffering. This can be used to pray for the suffering endured in times such as this. One important aspect of prayer is that when turning to God in prayer, one needs to know what one's needs are, and psalms of lament are examples of this. The psalms of lament conclude with an oath or vow of praise. At the end of it all, the lamentation is then changed into praise as a response to having been saved (cf. Ps 22).

To limit the scope, attention will be paid here to psalms of individual laments, though not all of them. An interesting aspect of these psalms is the fact that, amid extended distress of deep agony, suffering and affliction, there appears, interspersed, the expression of assurance and trust in God's salvation in these psalms. It is a striking fact that individual lament psalms, in most cases, end jubilantly in abrupt praise of God, and Psalm 57 provides a profound example of this (cf. DeClaissé, Jacobson & LaNeel Tanner 2014, p. 227; DeClaissé-Walford 2005, p. 146; Sung-Hun Lee 2005, p. 224). The aim here is not to research the reason why the abrupt transition from lament and sorrow to joy takes place but rather to prove that the lament psalms can be used as words for prayers through all ages. The lament psalm is a psalm in which the author or psalmist utters or sings prayers that God will deliver them from the depth they find themselves in, or crisis, or at times from enemies and at other times the defeat suffered in battle or from a life-threatening ailment (cf. Wenham 2013, p. 43). It is common in these psalms for the psalmist to portray an image that God has deserted or forsaken them and is not answering their cries of plea. This is an attitude that many in life can easily acclimatise with, more so in times such as these (e.g. COVID-19).

Throughout the book of Psalms, there are 42 psalms of lament, of which 30 are individual psalms of lament and twelve are psalms of communal lament. The individual lament forms the basic material of the Psalter and they stand out from other genres by number alone (Gunkel 1998, pp. 121-122). These poems or songs found their way into the worship services of the royal temple in Jerusalem (Ps 28, 61, 63). As the corpus of lament psalms is huge, only Psalm 13 (the title pinpoints David as the author, whose life would have provided many opportunities to inspire such a psalm) and Psalm 22 (the title of this song associates its authorship with David, who feels abandoned by God in the midst of vicious attacks from his enemies, and the historical books of the OT record more than one occasion in David's life that could have produced such a composition) will receive more attention. Lament is an instrument that people of God use to get through their pain, distress and suffering experienced. Lament is used as a reminder that they are never alone; God is there, and God can help them. A prayer of lament is a very important prayer to God's people, through which they plead with God to help deliver them from their distress, suffering and pain. Hence, Balentine (1993, p. 149) describes lament not only as an act to call God's attention to the problem but also to secure its correction. The aim of a lament prayer is mainly to persuade God to rescue his people in distress and act on their side. Thus, lament describes the troubles of life in all their different forms (cf. Futato 2009, p. 11). Following Brueggemann (1984, pp. 51-57), the psalm of lament is a psalm of destruction, an expression of the sorrow, distress, fear, anger, guilt or perplexity of life (cf. Futato 2009, p. 11). It is vital to note that prayers of lament are not primarily reflections and suffering, but they rather express the reality of suffering (cf. Balentine 1993, p. 150).

The NT frequently quotes the lament psalms. For example, Psalm 22 is the most quoted and Psalm 69 is the second most quoted (quoted in Jn 15:25, which is v. 4; in Jn 2:17 and Rm 15:3, which is v. 9; in Rm 11:9, which is vv. 22-23; and in Ac 1:20, which is v. 25) (cf. Wenham 2013, p. 6). Jesus, while on the cross, offered these psalms of lament of which the gospels attest. The early church also offered these psalms. There are various deliberations taking place in the psalms with a variety of participants who are involved in these deliberations (cf. Wallace 2005, p. 21). The psalmist and God are the main participants in these conversations.

■ An example of a psalm of lament

Psalm 10 is a prayer for rescue from the attacks of unscrupulous people:

O LORD, why do you stand so far away?

Why do you hide when I am in trouble? (v. 1)

This is an individual lament. The psalmist here cries about God's absence when it comes to wicked people.

■ Practical reasons from psalms of lament

O LORD, how long will you forget me? Forever?

How long will you look the other way? (Ps 13:1[2], 6)

Not everyone who comes to church (or who hears or reads the Bible) is full of joy and happiness. Many come with great burdens, challenges or difficulties, both physical and spiritual. They may include various illnesses, marital problems, financial difficulties, various pressure challenges at home, at work or life in general, including harassment, abuses, violence and persecution. Every stage in life brings with it all sorts of problems and challenges. How many times in life do we come to the crossroad or see no way out and need to be allowed to cry out to God in our distress, just as was the case with Job and Jesus himself (Wenham 2013):

Sufferers may pray the laments with hope that they will be able to say not only, 'How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?' but also, 'I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me' (Ps 13:1, 6). (p. 47)

In this psalm, the psalmist addresses several questions to God, describing his situation. These questions recapitulate the burden of the psalmist's complaint, which is directed against God (vv. 1-2). In the prayer in Psalm 13, there is an assumption that God is powerful enough to can effect some change in the psalmist's plight. In this prayer, the psalmist trusts that God can bring change in their distress and predicament. The words are well-articulated and can be used even today in our prayer (Wenham 2013):

By praying these Psalms, those who have no problems and difficulties in their lives can learn to sympathize with those in trouble and pray for those who are suffering or persecuted. (p. 47)

The petition in the LORD's prayer, 'Your kingdom come, your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven', can be prayed (Mt 6:10; cf. Van Wyk, 1982 p. 49, 2019 p. 108; Wenham 2013, pp. 47-48). The psalms of lament teach us not to be self-centred and also to pray for others. What is clear in his prayer is that it is genuine and honest. This psalm reminds us that movement from despair to praise is possible, for distress does not last forever!

■ The use of violence in laments

It is an undeniable fact that some of the laments seem too vicious to be used by Christians, for example: 'Break the arm of the wicked and evildoers; call his wickedness to account till you find none' (Ps 10:15). 'It is surely better to pray to God to punish the wicked than [*doing*] it yourself' (Wenham 2013, p. 49). Mostly, though, we read of people who take the law into their hands: 'Praying the laments breaks the circle of violence instead of perpetuating it' (Wenham 2013, p. 49).

'These prayers to God to judge the wicked [and] are an expression of hope in God's justice' (Wenham 2013, p. 49). None of us wants to see the wicked get away without being punished, as often happens in our times, and people are incited to distrust the justice system. It is very clear from these psalms that human justice is imperfect. It is an undeniable fact that today, in our country, police catch or apprehend offenders, but some who go to trial are acquitted despite everyone knowing that they are guilty. We often hear the cry in our country that perpetrators have more rights than honest citizens, which leads to people taking the law into their hands. It is a known fact that throughout the world, the rich exploit the poor, and we are powerless to combat and bring it to an end. Psalms of lament call upon God Almighty to put an end to injustice, exploitation and oppression. The psalmist in this regard, or one praying this, affirms without a doubt that God is a completely and utterly fair and all-knowing judge. These psalms of lament are a message of hope to those who suffer injustice that God will not let the wicked get away with it forever.

According to Zenger, these psalms of lament do more – they 'uncover the mechanisms of violence as actions and strategies emanating from concrete human beings and' instructions (cf. Zenger 1996, pp. 74–75, cited in Wenham 2013, p. 49).

In a nutshell, we are encouraged to pray these psalms if we really have concern for the suffering of our fellow Christians throughout the world.

■ Practical considerations

Psalms are a collection of eloquent, passionate songs and prayers of people who are in desperation. They cry to God because of these realities of life, and in our present time, we can relate to these challenges. Psalms provide an assurance that when we pray and worship, we are not expected to hide our own human weakness. In the Psalms, more so with psalms of lament, we are obliged to submit our circumstances openly and trustingly before God, for example, Psalms 13, 22 and 130. Brueggemann (1982, p. 24) states that the Psalms are not to be used in a vacuum but in a history where we are dying and rising and where God is at work, ending our old lives and making gracious new beginnings for us.

Psalms express the pain, grief, dismay and anger that life is not good, but they do not end there – they assert hope. The petitioner psychologically encourages himself, building hope in the agony being experienced. Since God is at work, even in suffering, even severe pains such as death faced by the petitioner make them enter into God's presence based on the realities of life faced. Psalms of lament are the route to hope, are vital for pastoral counselling, and can be used for prayer and singing. Pain and suffering are worldwide phenomena, and even though one is not affected, words of

psalms of petition, intercession and lamentation can be used or employed as prayer or be sung in caring for others. The words of these psalms help to psychologically build up hope. These psalms encourage and help us to openly pour our hearts out to God. They motivate us in dealing with the realities of life through the psalmist's experience.

■ Conclusion

All psalms are to be used as prayers. As Christians, we are, like Christ our master, called to suffer before we enter glory. And if we are saved from suffering ourselves, we should pray for those who do suffer, whether it be persecution or anything else, by using the words the Holy Spirit has inspired in the book of Psalms. Psalms of lament must also be used in our family worship (cf. Dt 6:7) and outside of family circles (cf. Eph 5:18; Col 3:16).

One major contribution, when studying psalms of lament closely, is their recognition of God's silence, regarding their actual pain and the consequences of feeling distant from God. This group of psalms reminds us that God is always near and ready to help, for he hears our deepest cries. One other contribution from these psalms is the picture of a relationship that is not perfect but one filled with tension and struggle. The image of trust is therefore not lost and helps one in being hopeful, even during difficulties and distress. The psalmist cries out to God to stop hiding his face when he needs him most, because he is always entirely dependent on his presence. The psalms of lament enable us to cry to God fully and truthfully, explaining our true emotions. These psalms are words of prayer we can still use to address God, for they describe various aspects of life affecting us daily.

Prayers in the Psalms: Prayers of penitence

Herrie van Rooy

Research Focus Area Ancient Texts: Text, Context, and Reception,
Faculty of Theology, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa

■ Introduction

In the early Western Church, seven psalms were identified as psalms of penitence (Ps 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130 and 143). It is not quite certain why all of them were included in this group; however, they have endured as a group from that time onwards. It is well-known that Luther published a study of these psalms (one of his earliest publications). Most of these psalms are presently regarded as individual laments, but not all individual laments can be regarded as examples of penitence or a confession of sins. This contribution will look at some historical perspectives on the penitential psalms, including Cassiodorus, Luther, Saint Augustine and modern authors. This is followed by a discussion of the distinction between individual laments and penitential psalms. In this regard, penitential prayers in narratives will also receive attention. Important terms will be discussed, along with the typical elements of psalms of confession or penitence. These psalms usually include an address to God, a prayer, a confession of sins and a petition for forgiveness. It is a valid question to ask whether all of these seven penitential psalms can indeed be regarded as such in light of the typical elements defined. Some psalms that were not traditionally included

How to cite: Van Rooy, H 2023, 'Prayers in the Psalms: Prayers of penitence', in AJ Coetsee & FP Viljoen (eds.), *Biblical Theology of prayer in the Old Testament*, Reformed Theology in Africa Series, vol. 12, AOSIS Books, Cape Town, pp. 113-127. <https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2023.BK417.07>

in the group of seven penitential psalms also contain typical elements of confession or penitence, such as Psalms 25, 39, 106 and 109. These psalms will be discussed in conjunction with the typical elements of psalms of confession. Two prototypical examples of psalms of confession will be analysed. Finally, unique perspectives on these psalms and their theological contribution will be discussed.

■ Some historical perspectives

As stated by many scholars (e.g. DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson & Tanner 2014, p. 101), Cassiodorus was probably the first to identify seven penitential psalms. In his conclusion of the interpretation of Psalm 142, Cassiodorus linked these seven psalms to one another. He stated that as we sin during the seven days of the week, this same number could help us to be saved when we pray these seven psalms (eds. Burghardt & Lawler 1991, p. 412). Nasuti (1999) discusses the origin of this group of psalms and the history of their interpretation in detail as part of his discussion of the importance of genre in the interpretation of biblical literature. He discusses Cassiodorus in some detail in this regard (Nasuti 1999, pp. 33–34), and he is of the opinion that this grouping can be traced back to Augustine. Nasuti (1999, pp. 37–38) posits that there is a connection between these psalms and Paul's letter to the Romans, as Paul mentions these seven psalms in relation to penitence and God's wrath (see also Balentine 2006, p. 2). The tradition of the seven penitential psalms is only found in Western Christianity and Augustine's influence could have played a major role in this development.

Luther published his study of the seven penitential psalms in 1517, with a revised version published in 1525. In the introduction to Volume 14 of Luther's works, Pelikan (in Luther 1999, p. ix) states that these seven psalms were called penitential by the early church and that they were recited on Fridays during Lent. In the headings to the comments on each of these psalms, he numbers them as the seven penitential psalms. In his interpretation of these psalms, Luther (1999) often refers to penitence:

- **Penitent heart:** Psalm 38 (p. 156), Psalm 51:1 (p. 166), Psalm 130:1 (p. 189)
- **Penitent life:** Psalm 51:5 (p. 169)
- **Penitent soul:** Psalm 102:2 and 10 (p. 182).

This booklet by Luther (1999) has been the subject of many studies. It is impossible to discuss all of these in detail. Seiling (2006) studied the context of the revisions of the 1525 edition of Luther's study, especially in light of changes in society in the intervening years. He provides an extensive bibliography containing many studies on this publication by Luther (Seiling 2006, pp. 46–47), demonstrating the interest in these psalms and Luther's interpretation of them. In the interpretations of Luther and other reformers,

these psalms functioned as a means to convince the believer of their sins and sinful nature (see also Nasuti 1999, pp. 40–41). The reformers did not follow the allegorical interpretation in medieval times but stressed faith, with forgiveness based in God's grace (Balentine 2006, pp. 2–3). In the examples discussed further, Luther's interpretation of these psalms will receive attention.

Anderson and Bishop (2003, pp. 77–96) discuss these seven psalms in detail, stating that these psalms have been grouped together since the Middle Ages. They even appear as a group in prayer books. These seven psalms were later linked to the seven deadly sins. The classification of these psalms as a group rests on contents rather than on form. Psalm 32, for example, is an individual song of thanksgiving. In this psalm, affliction leads to a deep sense of guilt (Anderson & Bishop 2003, p. 78). However, in Psalm 6, guilt and sin are not mentioned; instead, the psalm mentions relief from sickness and escape from enemies (Anderson & Bishop 2003, pp. 78–79). Enemies are mentioned in some instances, as in Psalm 143. These psalms differ from other laments in that they internalise the problem of evil. The enemy is not only 'out there' but also in the depths of one's being (Anderson & Bishop 2003, p. 79).

In the early church, these psalms functioned within the penitential system in use (see also Tanner 2007, p. 88). However, Tanner (2007, p. 89) argues that they may indeed still have a function in the church today, especially in preaching. She discusses psalms that appear in the lectionary of her church in some detail, namely Psalms 32, 51 and 130. Throntveit (1987, pp. 495, 506–510) also argues for the use of these psalms in conjunction with Lent. It is indeed a relevant task to determine whether such psalms of confession or penitence still have an important role to play in preaching and the life of the church today.

■ Confessions and individual laments

The penitential psalms are frequently indicated as laments in the literature. As stated by Anderson and Bishop (2003, p. 78), their identification is based on content, not form. Varied commentary appears in the discussion of the individual forms of the psalms in the literature, some of which is quoted in the following paragraphs.

Psalm 6 is regarded as an individual lament by most commentators consulted, with additional remarks by some: Jacobson (cited in DeClaissé-Walford et al. 2014, p. 101) typifies this psalm as an individual prayer for help; Longman (2014, p. 72) calls it a lament; Craigie and Tate (2004, p. 91) classify it as a psalm of sickness in addition to an individual lament; Kraus (1993a, p. 160) calls it a prayer song of sickness and healing; and Anderson

and Bishop (2003, p. 219) consider it an individual lament, adding 'penitential psalm' in brackets.

Tanner (in DeClaissé-Walford et al. 2014, p. 306) calls Psalm 32 a thanksgiving song. Craigie and Tate (2004, p. 265) also use this term and add that it was adapted to the wisdom tradition. Kraus (1993a, p. 367) also calls it a song of thanksgiving, as do Anderson and Bishop (2003, p. 220), adding 'penitential psalm' in brackets. Longman (2014, p. 163) says that it is traditionally called a penitential psalm.

Tanner (cited in DeClaissé-Walford et al. 2014, p. 306) regards Psalm 38 as an individual prayer for help. Longman (2014, p. 181) calls it an individual lament, as do Anderson and Bishop (2003, p. 220), adding 'penitential psalm'. Craigie and Tate (2004, p. 302) classify it as a prayer of a sick person, with the central section resembling a lament. Kraus (1993a, p. 410) calls it a prayer song of sickness and healing.

Psalm 51 is generally classified as an individual lament (Anderson & Bishop 2003, p. 221; DeClaissé-Walford et al. 2014, p. 453; Longman 2014, p. 218; Tate 1998, p. 8 - who adds that it is a penitential psalm). Hossfeld and Zenger (2005, p. 12) also consider it an individual lament, but add that it is a penitential psalm and for use for sickness. According to Kraus (1993a, p. 500), it is a prayer song with a description of distress and petition, as well as a thanksgiving.

Jacobson (in DeClaissé-Walford et al. 2014, p. 748) considers Psalm 102 a prayer for help, while other scholars call it a lament. Longman (2014, p. 252), Kraus (1993b, p. 283), and Hossfeld and Zenger (2001, p. 281) call it an individual lament. Allen (2002, p. 17) discusses different possibilities but considers an individual lament as the best option. Anderson and Bishop (2003, p. 222) say that it is an individual lament including hymnic elements. They also identify it as a penitential psalm in brackets.

Psalm 130 is generally regarded as an individual lament (DeClaissé-Walford et al. 2014, p. 926). Longman (2014, p. 430) adds that this psalm includes an acknowledgement of sin and a need for forgiveness, which is typical of penitential psalms. Anderson and Bishop (2003, p. 223) also consider this psalm a penitential psalm. Hossfeld and Zenger (2001, p. 426) provide an extensive discussion about the origin and composition of this psalm but regard it as an individual lament. Allen (2002, p. 253) states that most scholars regard it as an individual lament. Kraus (1993b, p. 465) regards Psalms 130 and 52 as penitential psalms.

Psalm 143 is also generally regarded as an individual lament (Allen 2002, p. 352; Anderson & Bishop 2003, p. 223; DeClaissé-Walford et al. 2014, p. 980; Hossfeld & Zenger 2001, p. 572). Longman (2014, p. 462) adds that the psalmist knows that his sins have caused problems. However, the

penitential aspect does not receive much emphasis. The psalmist also speaks of his enemies, as frequently seen in individual laments. Kraus (1993b, p. 535) also mentions enemies and says the psalm is a prayer song of an individual.

Most of these penitential psalms are classified as individual laments, with a few exceptions. As indicated above, this identification is more a matter of content than form. The movement away from the traditional identification of these psalms as penitential psalms can be attributed to the development of the form-critical approach to the psalms. It is impossible to discuss the development of this approach in detail here (see Balentine 2006, pp. 3-8; Nasuti 1999, pp. 42-44, who discuss the contributions of Gunkel, Mowinckel, Westermann, and Brueggemann in some detail).

In the discussion of the form of laments, reference is often made to the seminal article of Claus Westermann (1974). He starts his discussion with remarks about the deliverance from Egypt, where a specific sequence is followed in the tradition of these events. This pattern is found in the credo of Deuteronomy 26:5-11 and in Exodus 1-15. The sequence consists of a prehistory, an account of distress, a call for help, a hearkening, a leading out and into and a response (Westermann 1974, pp. 20-21). In this way, the form of a lament is placed in the context of the deliverance from Egypt, which became the basis for the relationship between God and Israel (p. 21). Lamentation is a part of what happens between God and humans (p. 22). The lament in the Psalms has an important place in the history of communal and individual laments (p. 25). Westermann identifies a fixed sequence of the elements of laments, namely address (with introductory petition), lamentation, a turning to God (including a confession of trust), a petition, and a vow of praise (p. 26). A lament is an appeal directed to the one who can change the suffering (p. 27). The lament can be directed to God as a complaint, toward people (against enemies, for example) or toward the person uttering the lament (p. 27). In the Psalms, the individual lament is the most common (p. 31). Westermann states that confession of sin may be part of a lament, but this is not very common (p. 32). If the confession of a sin is included, it must be related to a specific sin (p. 33).

In his study of penitential psalms, Throntveit (1987, p. 496) discusses the elements of a lament to demonstrate how laments move from lament to praise. The address serves to obtain God's attention and may recount past events briefly. The description of the distress can be regarded as the lament proper, describing the situation and condition of the praying person. The confession of trust reiterates the current situation, while the petition contains the request for God's help. This could, for example, be a prayer to be delivered from enemies. The final element is a promise to praise God.

Although some of the penitential psalms are close to this traditional form of lament, the most important element distinguishing penitentiary psalms from laments in general is the awareness and confession of sin. A penitential psalm contains at least an indication of sin, and then not sin in general but a very specific sin.

In evaluating the penitential psalms, recent research on penitential prayers is pertinent (see the volume edited by Boda, Falk & Werline 2006). For the purposes of this contribution, the penitential prayers in canonical literature are especially relevant. In this regard, four penitential prayers in Ezra 9:6–15, Nehemiah 1:5–11 and 9:6–37 and Daniel 9:4–19 are frequently discussed (Balentine 2006, p. 8). These prayers are narrative in form instead of poetical, as is the case with the penitential psalms.

Werline (2006) defines penitential prayers as follows:

Penitential prayer is a direct address to God in which an individual, group, or an individual on behalf of a group confesses sins and petitions for forgiveness as an act of repentance. (p. xv)

This definition will be useful in determining which psalms (whether part of the seven penitential psalms or not) can indeed be regarded as penitential. What distinguishes a penitential prayer from a lament is the confession of sins and petition for forgiveness.

■ Terminology

In psalms where a confession of sins is made, one would expect to see words and phrases like ‘sin’ or ‘to sin’, ‘to confess’, ‘to forgive’ or ‘be forgiven’ and ‘to punish’ or ‘be punished’.

As far as sin is concerned, three groups of words can be distinguished. There are words related to the root **חטא** (the verb **חטא** and the nouns **חַטָּאָה**, **חַטָּא**, **חַטָּא** and **חַטָּאת**), words related to the root **פשע** (the verb **פשע** and the noun **פְּשָׁע**), and words related to the root **עוה** (the *verb* **עוה** and the noun **עֲוֹן**).

Koch (1977–2012a, p. 313) states that the root **חטא** is used almost exclusively in laments in the Psalter. Psalms 32:1–5 and 51:3–11 (especially v. 6) exhibit a deep consciousness of sin, especially sin against God (Koch 1977–2012a, p. 214). In the penitential psalms, the verb occurs in the Qal only in Psalm 51:6 and in the *pi’el* only in Psalm 51:9. The *pi’el* of the verb in Psalm 51:9 occurs in a plea to the LORD to purify the sinner. The noun **חַטָּא** [sinner] occurs in Psalm 51:15, where the psalmist undertakes to teach sinners the ways of the LORD.

The nouns **חַטָּא**, **חַטָּאָה**, and **חַטָּאת** are all used for ‘sin’. As far as the penitential psalms are concerned, **חַטָּא** occurs in Psalm 51:7, 11, **חַטָּאָה** in Psalm 32:1, and **חַטָּאת** in Psalms 32:1, 5 (twice), 38:4, 19 and 51:4, 5. Koch (1977–2012a, p. 314)

states that **חַטָּא** refers to sin extending over generations. No atonement can be expected for this kind of sin. **חַטָּאָה** refers to an individual act, while **חַטָּאת** refers to an act that must be confessed. The latter requires atonement. The first-person singular perfect form of the verb can be regarded as an official individual confession of sin, as in Psalm 51:6 ('Against you alone I have sinned'; Knierim 1997, p. 408).

As far as the root **פִּשַׁע** is concerned in the seven penitential psalms, the verb **פִּשַׁע** occurs only in Psalms 51:15 and in 37:38. The Qal participle is used parallel to the noun **חַטָּאים** in Psalm 51:15 ('Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you'; NRSV). In Psalm 37:38 it is used parallel to **רִשְׁעִים**. The participle in these instances indicates apostates from the LORD (Seebass 1977–2012, p. 145).

In the penitential psalms, the noun **פְּשָׁע** is used in Psalm 32:1 and 5, and Psalm 51:3 and 5. In Psalm 32:1 it is used parallel to **חַטָּאָה**. It also occurs in Psalm 32:5, along with a number of terms important for the penitential psalms. This will be discussed in detail further. The verse is as follows (Ps 32):

חַטָּאתִי אֲדַיְעָה וְעֹנֵי לֹא־כִסִּיתִי אֶמְרֹתַי אֲדַהֵּה עָלַי בְּשַׁעֵי לִיהוָה וְאַתָּה יְצַחֵק עֲוֹן חַטָּאתִי

NRSV: Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and you forgave the guilt of my sin. (v. 5)

In Psalm 51:3 the noun is the object of the verb 'to blot out, to erase'. In Psalm 51:3, it is the object of the verb 'to make known'. The noun usually has the meaning 'offense' or 'transgression', of the kind that leads to outrage or indignation (Seebass 1977–2012, p. 143).

עוֹן is used in the following Psalms: 32:2 and 5 (twice), 38:5 and 19, 51:4, 7, 11 and 130:3, 8. Koch (1977–2012b, p. 55) mentions that this noun occurs 31 times in the Psalms, with almost half in laments or thanksgiving songs of an individual. Of these instances, ten occur in the penitential psalms. It is also often used parallel to other words for sin. In Psalm 32:5, it is used parallel to **חַטָּאת** at the beginning of the verse (see also Ps 38:19; 51:4). It is used parallel to **חַטָּא** in Psalm 51:7. In Psalm 51:11 it is used parallel to **חַטָּאָה**. In Psalm 32:2, the person to whom God does not reckon iniquity is called blessed. In Psalm 38:5, the iniquities weigh heavy on the psalmist. In Psalm 130:3, the psalmist says that the LORD does not remember the iniquities of the psalmist, while Verse 8 states that the LORD will redeem Israel from its iniquities. In Psalm 32:5, it is used in the expression **עוֹן חַטָּאתִי**. The second noun in this construct probably refers to an individual deed, while the first refers to the consequences of the deed (Koch 1977–2012b, p. 552). In these psalms, the iniquities were the cause of the suffering of the psalmist (Koch 1977–2012b, p. 55). Further, Koch mentions that the relation between cause and effect in the use of this word is especially clear in Psalm 51.

In Psalm 32:5, the confession of sin is expressed by using different words: ‘to make known’ [*Hiphil* of ידע], ‘to not hide’ [*pi’el* of כסה] and ‘to confess’ [*Hiphil* of ידה]. In Psalm 38:19, the *Hiphil* of the verb נגד is used. In Psalm 51, a specific verb is not used for confession, but the psalmist states his sin in Verses 5–7. Psalm 130:3 refers to the iniquities of the poet by enumerating them.

The verb ידה used in Psalm 32:5 often has the meaning ‘to praise’, but in this instance, the meaning ‘to confess’ is evident (Mayer 1977–2012, p. 428).

For forgiving the sins of the psalmist, נשא and כסה are used in Psalm 32:1, in both instances in the Qal passive participle. In Psalm 6:1, the psalmist uses two verbs in his petition to the LORD not to punish him: the *Hiphil* of יכה and the *pi’el* of יטר. These two verbs are also used in Psalm 32:8. In Psalm 6:3, the verb רפא is for the request that the LORD would heal his illness. In Psalm 51:3, 11 the verb מָחָה is used in the request of the psalmist to blot out his sins. The noun סְלִיחָה, ‘forgiveness’, occurs in Psalm 130:4.

■ Typical elements of prayers of confession

From the previous discussion, it is evident that the seven penitential psalms do not have a common structure, although some of them may resemble the structure of a lament. In light of the probable structure of laments and the elements present in penitential psalms, typical elements may be distinguished in these psalms. All these elements do not appear in all these psalms, nor do they appear in a fixed order. Werline’s definition, discussed above, can be taken as a starting point.

Four typical elements can be distinguished from that definition, namely that the psalm:

1. contains a direct address to God
2. contains a prayer by an individual, a group or an individual on behalf of a group
3. contains a confession of sins
4. contains a petition for forgiveness as an act of repentance.

One would expect that all these psalms would begin with an address directed at God, and this is indeed the case in Psalms 6:1; 38:2; 51:3; 102:2; 130:1; and 143:1.

Psalm 32, however, does not begin with an address but with a statement that one, whose transgressions are forgiven, is happy. The LORD is mentioned in Verse 2 and is addressed in Verse 5.

As far as the subject of these prayers is concerned, an individual is speaking in all seven penitential psalms.

Not all of these psalms have a direct confession of sins, but the confession is very clear in Psalm 32:5. The psalmist states that he made his sin known to the LORD (אֲוִרְיָעָה, the *Hiphil* of יָדַע), he did not hide it, and he took the decision to confess his sins (אֲוִדָּה, the *Hiphil* of יָדָה, not the *Hithpael*, as is often the case elsewhere in the Old Testament [OT]). In Psalm 51:5-7, the psalmist confesses his sins, saying that he knows his transgressions, that his sin is always before him, and that he has sinned against the LORD alone. In Psalm 38:5, the psalmist says that his iniquities have gone over his head. In Verse 19, he confesses his iniquity using the *Hiphil* of the verb נָגַד. In Psalm 6, a confession of sins is presupposed by the request in Verse 2, that the LORD should not rebuke the psalmist. The same occurs in Psalm 38:2. Psalm 102:11 also refers to the anger of the LORD. Psalm 130:3 refers to iniquities. Psalm 143:2 refers to the judgement of the LORD, presupposing transgressions on the side of the psalmist. In these five psalms, the confession is implicit rather than explicit, as is the case in Psalms 32 and 51.

The petition directed at God may touch on different subjects, including a prayer to be forgiven or to save the life of the supplicant. In a penitential psalm, the supplicant would normally ask for forgiveness. Forgiveness is mentioned in Psalm 32:5. In Psalm 51, the psalmist asks for forgiveness and mercy (v. 3) and that he may experience joy (v. 11; see also vv. 12-13).

In Psalm 6, the psalmist asks for mercy and healing (v. 3) and for his life to be saved (v. 5; see also Ps 143:11). In Verse 3, he uses the imperative הִנְנִי, a form that occurs only in the Psalter. According to Fabry (1977-2012, p. 32), this form may be accompanied by a consciousness of sin, as is the case in Psalm 51:3.

In Psalm 38:17, the psalmist asks the LORD to prevent his enemies from rejoicing over his misfortune. In Verse 22, the psalmist asks the LORD not to forsake him. In Psalm 102:4, the psalmist asks the LORD not to hide himself from the psalmist (see also Ps 143:7). In Psalms 143:9, 13, the psalmist asks to be saved from his enemies.

The lament is evident in all of these psalms. Consider, for example, Psalms 6:3-8, 32:4-5, 38:4-9, 51:3-7, 102:3-12, 130:6-7 and 143:3-4. Again, in all of these psalms, the psalmist turns to the LORD, frequently with an expression of trust, for example, in Psalms 6:4 and 10-11, 32:5, 10-11; 38:10; 51:2; 102:13-14; 130:6; and 143:8-9.

In Psalm 32:10-11, the righteous are asked to rejoice in the LORD. A vow of praise is found in Psalm 51:16-17. Praise is also mentioned in Psalm 102:19, 22.

Can the seven penitential psalms all be regarded as such at the hand of these typical elements? In light of the discussion of the different elements of a penitential psalm, Psalms 32, 38 and 51 qualify as penitential, while the others are better regarded as individual laments.

Some psalms that were not traditionally included in the group of seven penitential psalms also contain typical elements of confession or penitence, such as Psalms 25, 39, 106 and 109.

Psalms 25 contains all the elements of a penitential psalm. It is spoken by an individual who addresses God at the very beginning of the psalm (in v. 1). It mentions the sins of the psalmist (vv. 7, 11, 18) and asks for forgiveness (vv. 11, 18). It also asks the LORD not to think about the transgressions of the psalmist. Longman (2014, p. 142) considers this psalm an individual lament. Craigie and Tate (2004, p. 217) state that this psalm is usually typified as an individual lament; however, they regard it as a prayer of confidence. Tanner (in DeClaissé-Walford et al. 2014, p. 254) concurs. Kraus (1993a, p. 317) regards it as a prayer for forgiveness and guidance. The psalm also contains a petition to the LORD to save the psalmist from his enemies. It has penitential elements but cannot be classified as a penitential psalm.

Psalms 39 is an individual lament. It mentions sin (vv. 9, 10), but it does not contain a confession of sin or a petition for forgiveness.

Psalms 106 has some similarities with the penitential prayers mentioned above (Ezr 9:6-15; Neh 1:5-11; 9:6-37; Dn 9:4-19). It tells a part of the early history of Israel, with a focus on how the people sinned in Egypt, at the Red Sea, during the time in the desert and after the occupation of the land. The psalmist begins by praising the LORD and asks the LORD to remember him. He then switches to the first-person plural and talks about the people in the third-person plural. The psalm is a confession of the sins of the people, but it does not petition the LORD for forgiveness, but rather for the salvation of the people and their return from exile. It is therefore best regarded as a historical poem, a lament or a plea for salvation. It has some elements of a penitential psalm.

Psalms 109 is an individual lament. The psalmist asks to be delivered from his enemies, but there is no confession of sin or petition for forgiveness.

Although the four psalms discussed here have some elements of penitential psalms, they cannot be classified as such.

■ Analysis of exemplary penitential psalms: Psalms 38 and 51

The two examples under discussion are Psalms 38 and 51. They are clearly penitential in character and can be regarded as the best examples of such psalms.

■ Psalm 38

The translation is that of the NRSV. The headings are added to clarify the structure and content of the psalm:

Superscript

1. A Psalm of David, for the memorial offering.

Address and plea

2. O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger, or discipline me in your wrath.
3. For your arrows have sunk into me, and your hand has come down on me.

Suffering and confession

4. There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin.
5. For my iniquities have gone over my head; they weigh like a burden too heavy for me.
6. My wounds grow foul and fester because of my foolishness;
7. I am utterly bowed down and prostrate; all day long I go around mourning.
8. For my loins are filled with burning, and there is no soundness in my flesh.
9. I am utterly spent and crushed; I groan because of the tumult of my heart.

Longing for the LORD

10. O LORD, all my longing is known to you; my sighing is not hidden from you.
11. My heart throbs, my strength fails me; as for the light of my eyes – it also has gone from me.

Friends and enemies

12. My friends and companions stand aloof from my affliction, and my neighbours stand far off.
13. Those who seek my life lay their snares; those who seek to hurt me speak of ruin, and meditate treachery all day long.

Isolation of the sufferer

14. But I am like the deaf, I do not hear; like the mute, who cannot speak.
15. Truly, I am like one who does not hear, and in whose mouth is no retort.

Plea to God and confession

16. But it is for you, O LORD that I wait; it is you, O LORD my God, who will answer.

17. For I pray, 'Only do not let them rejoice over me, those who boast against me when my foot slips'.
18. For I am ready to fall, and my pain is ever with me.
19. For⁶⁰ I confess my iniquity; I am sorry for my sin.

Enemies

20. Those who are my foes without cause are mighty, and many are those who hate me wrongfully.
21. Those who render me evil for good are my adversaries because I follow after good.

Final plea

22. Do not forsake me, O LORD; O my God, do not be far from me; make haste to help me, O LORD, my salvation.

There is much disagreement about the structure of this psalm in the literature, as can be seen simply by comparing the analyses of DeClaissé-Walford et al. (2014, p. 355) and Longman (2014, p. 182). This disagreement is related to the fact that this psalm is quite complex in more than one sense. On the one hand, the iniquities of the psalmist are mentioned, typical of penitential psalms. On the other hand, enemies are also mentioned, which is not typical of penitential laments. This complex situation is reflected in the structure above, accepted for this psalm.

Verse 1 is the superscription, with no direct link to the contents of the psalm. Verses 2 and 3 address the LORD and ask him to refrain from rebuking or punishing the psalmist. The suffering and confession of Verses 4–9 are related to the bodily suffering of the psalmist on account of his sin. Because of his suffering, he longs for the LORD, addressing him again in Verses 10–11. He knows that the LORD sees his suffering and hears his complaint. In Verses 12–13, false friends and enemies who seek his downfall are introduced. Because of them, he is isolated from society, as expressed in Verses 14–15. In the first plea and confession, his iniquities are relevant. In his second plea in Verse 16–19, the psalmist confesses his iniquities. However, his enemies are also mentioned. These enemies are mentioned again in Verses 20–21. They repay the psalmist evil for the good he has done them. In the final plea in Verse 22, the psalmist asks the LORD not to forsake him and to help him quickly.

From this description, it is clear that Psalm 38 may be regarded as a penitential psalm, but it also includes elements from a lament, namely, the references to enemies. Perhaps the actions of the enemies may be regarded as part of the punishment he endures. Luther (1999, p. 156) describes this psalm as follows: 'This psalm portrays most clearly the manner, words, acts, thoughts, and gestures of a truly penitent heart'.

60. 'For' is added to the NRSV as it is in the Hebrew, like in the previous verses.

■ Psalm 51 (Adapted; NRSV)

Heading

1. To the leader. A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

Address and plea for mercy

2. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.
3. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.
4. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

Confession

5. Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgement.
6. Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.
7. You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.

Plea

8. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
9. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
10. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.
11. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.
12. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your Holy Spirit from me.
13. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Vow

14. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

Plea

15. Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.
16. O LORD, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.
17. For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.
18. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Prayer for Zion

19. Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, then you will delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

This division of the psalm into different units is based primarily on a syntactical analysis of the psalm. The superscription to the psalm is found in Verse 1. The address and first plea is found in Verses 2–4. The divine name אֱלֹהִים is used in the address in Verse 2. It occurs again in Verses 11, 15 (twice) and 18 (twice). This divine name is very common in the second book of the Psalms. The only other divine name in this psalm is יְיָ, in Verse 16. Many commentators link Verse 4 to the next verses as a part of the confession of sin (e.g. DeClaissé-Walford et al. 2014, p. 454; Longman 2014, p. 219; Tate 1998, p. 12). However, it is linked syntactically to the two previous verses by the causal particle כִּי. The confession is phrased with first-person singular verbal forms in Verses 5 and 6, but God is addressed in the confession with second-person verbal forms in Verses 5 and 7. The address concludes with an imperative at the end of Verse 8. The second plea starts in Verses 8 and 9, not with imperatives but with imperfects (probably jussives, as the jussives in v. 13). In Verses 10 and 11, imperatives are used again. Verse 12 has two jussives, while Verse 13 has an imperative and a jussive. The vow in Verse 14 starts with a singular cohortative. The plea in Verses 15–18 starts with an imperative in Verse 15, followed by a jussive in Verse 16. The causal clause in Verse 17 has two second-person singular imperfects, with another one at the end of Verse 18. Verse 19 begins with an imperative again, but the introduction of Zion and Jerusalem separates these two verses from the rest of the psalm.

This psalm can be identified as a penitential psalm on account of the confession of sin coupled with the plea for mercy and restoration. The superscription was not part of the original psalm; it is a very early interpretation. This interpretation links the plea to a specific episode in the life of David and agrees with the penitent character of the psalm.

■ Unique perspectives and theological contribution

If Werline's definition is taken as a point of departure, the most significant characteristics of penitential psalms are an acknowledgement and confession of sin and a petition for forgiveness. Sin as a reality in the consciousness of the psalmist is the *sine qua non*.

Sin is frequently mentioned in the seven penitential psalms. The different terms for sin have been discussed earlier. In almost all instances, the sins of

the psalmist are mentioned, as in Psalms 32:1, 5; 38:5, 19; and 51:3–8. The sins of the people are mentioned in Psalm 130:3. It is also recognised that sin can lead to punishment or suffering, as in Psalms 6:2; 32:4; 38:2–4; 51:10; and 102:10–12.

The acknowledgement of sin may be followed by a confession of guilt. This is the other fundamental characteristic of penitential psalms, as in Psalms 32:5; 38:19; 51:5–7; 130:3, 8; and 143:2. This can lead to remorse and repentance, as in Psalm 51:12, 18–19 and 143:10. Asking for forgiveness is also common in these psalms, as in Psalms 32:2; 38:16; 51:9, 11; 102:2–3; and 130:4. Related to this is a plea for mercy, as in Psalms 6:3, 5, 7; 32:7; 38:22, 23; 51:3; 130:4; and 143:6–8. Trust in the LORD is also expressed, as in Psalm 32:10; 38:22–23; and 143:1, 10–11.

As far as the theology of the psalms is concerned, the importance of the recognition of sin, the confession of guilt, and the petition for forgiveness are typical of these psalms. This kind of theology is expressed in the penitential prayers, occurring especially in narratives in historical books. These psalms have an enduring message for the church and believers. Churches and individuals must be able to look critically at their own history, recognise where they went wrong and ask for forgiveness. This also necessitates some manner of restitution in the present.

■ Conclusion

The penitential psalms may be regarded as a discrete group, as has been the case in the history of their interpretation and use in the church. However, not all of them include all of the elements expected from such a group. Psalm 51 may be considered a prime example of a penitential psalm. Psalm 32 also contains most of the characteristics of a penitential psalm. Psalm 38, by contrast, presents a mixed form: it includes a confession, typical of penitential psalms, but it also refers to enemies and contains a plea to be delivered from them. In terms of a unique contribution, this research serves to reiterate that penitence can indeed play an important role in the life of the church today, especially in acknowledging the wrongs of the past.

Prayer in Job

Edward Ho^{a,b}

^aBiblical Studies, Chinese Online School of Theology,
Toronto, Canada

^bCarey Theological College,
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

■ Introduction⁶¹

Aside from the frame (Job 1:1–2:13; 42:10–17), the book of Job is made up of a series of speeches by different characters, briefly introduced by the narrator. Job, the protagonist, uses extreme and unconventional language to express his frustration and desire in response to the catastrophes unleashed upon him and the ‘comforting’ words offered by his friends. Elements of prayers contained in the Psalms and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible are found throughout his utterances. A growing number of scholars have recognised the fact that religious language is a central theme in the book of Job (Breitkopf 2020; Gutiérrez 1987; Pohl 2020; Vogels 1995). Each character in the drama disapproves of the words spoken by Job in one way or another.

A satisfactory reading experience of any literary work, including the book of Job, includes coherence at both the story level and the rhetorical level. In examining the narrative progression, the reader seeks to establish

61. This chapter represents a substantial reworking of various sections of the author’s PhD thesis: Ho, E 2012, ‘A Quest for Coherence: A Study of Internal Quotations in the book of Job’, under the supervision of Dr Mark J Boda and Dr Paul S Evans, McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, Ontario.

How to cite: Ho, E 2023, ‘Prayer in Job’, in AJ Coetsee & FP Viljoen (eds.), *Biblical Theology of prayer in the Old Testament*, Reformed Theology in Africa Series, vol. 12, AOSIS Books, Cape Town, pp. 129–145. <https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2023.BK417.08>

a configuration of the story by developing an interest in the mimetic, thematic and synthetic components of the narrative and generating corresponding responses (Phelan 2005, p. 20). The way in which these interests are cultivated is through the presence of conflicts in the text. In general, there are two main types of unstable relations within a narrative (Phelan 1989):

[7]he first are those occurring within the story, instabilities between characters, created by situations, and complicated and resolved through actions. The second are those created by the discourse, instabilities – of value, belief, opinion, knowledge, expectation – between the text and the reader. (p. 15)⁶²

In this chapter, I will examine the narrative progression of the book of Job, section by section, and explore the subject of prayer throughout the reading experience.

■ The prologue

The story begins with the introduction of the main character, Job. The rest of the prologue comprises two cycles of verbal exchanges between YHWH and Satan, together with the consequences of the divine council's decisions regarding Job. In each round, Satan contends that Job's piety is dependent upon the blessings bestowed by YHWH and suggests that Job would openly repudiate God if YHWH withholds his protection and blessings. YHWH accepts Satan's suggestion and lets him destroy all that Job has in the first round and Job's body in the second round.

After each round of disasters, Job gives a verbal response, accompanied by his posture or action. In round one, the first declaration ('Naked I came out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there'; Job 1:21-22) in Job's three-part verbal response is similar to the words of Qohelet in Ecclesiastes 5:14 [ET 15]: 'As [a man] came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came'. Whether one author is quoting another or both of them are drawing from a common proverbial source is not a concern. What is important is that the latter 'is an expression of nihilistic resignation' (Weiss 1983, p. 59). Moreover, the reality of death is clearly in view. The second declaration ('YHWH has given and YHWH has taken away'; Job 1:21) is perhaps another proverbial saying associated with death. The sentiment is expressed similarly in 1 Samuel 3:18 and the Arabic formula, 'His LORD gave him, his LORD has taken him away' (Musil 1907-1908, p. 3:427).

62. The story-discourse model of a narrative is also espoused by many renowned literary critics such as Chatman (1978) and Booth (1983). I find Phelan's works most helpful because the discussion of his concept of narrative progression serves as a heuristic channel through which the two levels of a narrative can be navigated, even though I see the unstable relations created by the discourse as instabilities between the text and the reader rather than between the author or narrator and the authorial audience.

The saying can connote a pious affirmation of divine sovereignty or a defiant complaint of one's disastrous fate (Guillaume 2007, p. 464). Nevertheless, the third declaration ('blessed be the name of YHWH'; Job 1:21) is doubtlessly a declaration of praise. This statement is almost a verbatim repetition of the opening exhortation in Psalms 113, which is clearly a hymn of praise and testimony. In round two, Job does not utter any prayer-like words. His verbal response is directed toward his wife, expressing his understanding of God's habitual behaviour. After each round, Job's verbal response is followed by the narrator's comment. In both cases, the narrator confirms that Job does not sin by speaking inappropriately.

As the reading experience continues, none would fail to recognise the drastic stylistic difference between the speeches (Job 3:1-42:9) and the frame (Job 1:1-2:13; 42:10-17). The former is composed of sophisticated poetry full of striking images and double entendres, but the latter is written in fable-like prose. This aesthetic judgement invites the reader to perceive the work as more than a typical didactic narrative. Even if the prologue might have given the false impression to some members of the audience in the first reading that they have entered a fantasy land of order and simplicity, the complex world of competing core religious values in the rest of the book resists such an interpretation. Job's first verbal response may thus be understood as a combination of 'stereotyped, pious formulas' (Vogels 1994, p. 371), which do not reflect how Job really feels. An alternative approach is to take the statement 'Blessed be the name of YHWH' as ironic in the form of sarcasm.⁶³ The point is not to judge which reading is a better interpretation. The ambiguity may be intentional to create the tension of what defines an appropriate response in the midst of suffering.

■ Job's opening outburst

The protagonist's provocative outburst in Chapter 3 marks the beginning of the poetic section of the book. Job uses the form of a curse to begin to express his impossible desire that he had never been born. While the word 'curse' is almost a taboo in the prologue, Job is not shy to use different Hebrew verbs [קַבַּב, אָרַר (v. 8)] directly to convey this sense within his malediction. Despite the provocative nature of Job's words, his imprecation is not without parallel in the Hebrew Bible. Jeremiah the prophet uttered something very similar in form and content (Jr 20:14-18). Although the reader may not be able to decide on the literary dependence of the two passages in view, the presence of the Jeremiah passage at least reveals that Job's malediction originates in a known Hebrew tradition. A close

63. Embracing an ironic sense of the declaration is not the same as taking the *verb* אָרַר as a euphemism for a curse. For the latter understanding of this verse, see Guillaume (2000, pp. 13-15).

comparison between the two passages also suggests that the Joban author appears to push this tradition to the extreme. Considering that Jeremiah only curses the day of his birth, Job tries to eliminate the day of his birth from existence. Job's chain of thought progresses from his wish that he had never been born to his desire to have died at birth. Job then laments the brutal reality that God continues to sustain the vitality of those sufferers who prefer to choose death over life.

The provocative lament of Job introduces an unstable situation to the narrative. This becomes one of the instabilities that the reader expects to be resolved. More importantly, unlike the ends of Chapters 1 and 2, the narrator no longer presents his evaluation of what Job has spoken. The reader is compelled to pass ethical judgements on Job on the one hand and to determine the rhetorical purpose of the text on the other. The tension created by Job's provocative language will sustain the reader's interest until the very end of the story.

■ The speeches of the friends in the first cycle of dialogue

Each of Job's friends always begins his speech by criticising what Job has spoken. Although the technique of decrying the opponent's arguments as mere words is common in wisdom disputation in the ancient Near East, the unusual frequency of such remarks in the book of Job strongly implies that 'proper speech' to and about God is itself the issue at stake. Up to Chapter 3, the instability of the story mainly surrounds Job's inner struggle, or at best, the conflict between Job and God. Eliphaz's first verbal response to Job develops this conflict into a social problem. The initial intended consolation (Job 2:11) has now turned into a disputation. In using the first-person plural as self-identification (Job 4:2; 5:27), Eliphaz sees the conflict as not only between Job and himself alone but also between Job and the three friends or even the group of people who hold a similar view as his. Job's provocative outburst deeply disturbs Eliphaz and incites him to speak up.

Eliphaz's primary advice to Job is expressed in his hypothetical confession and model doxology (Job 5:8-16). Eliphaz uses 'to seek God' to summarise what his response would be if he should suffer a similar calamity. Under the circumstances, a prayer of lament would perhaps be an appropriate response (Clines 1989, p. 143). Eliphaz, however, unexpectedly models for Job a doxology in praise of God's power and providence. While showing off his extraordinary faith, 'Eliphaz seeks to counter the dissembling curse-lament of Job with words of affirmation and praise of God whose power, wisdom, and justice maintain the equilibrium of the created order' (Perdue 1991, p. 111).

Similarly, Bildad lists two conditions for Job to fulfil in order to receive God's restoration (Job 8:5-7). The first criterion is that he must approach the deity in the spirit of genuine piety, seeking God and imploring favour from him. The terms Bildad uses may refer to general expressions of worship and prayer. The same terms may also denote an act of repentance (cf. Hs 5:15) and a request for forgiveness (1 Ki 8:33, 47; 2 Chr 6:4, 37). Either way, Bildad appears to encourage Job to appeal to the traditional motifs such as petition and confession of sin in the psalms of lament to secure his prospective restoration. The second criterion, according to Bildad, is that Job must be morally pure and upright. Bildad assures Job that God would rouse [עורר] himself for Job and restore his rightful abode as long as Job satisfies all these prerequisites. The verb עורר is typical of the language of psalmody, in which the psalmists lament the absence and inactivity of God and call upon him to wake up. Bildad's frequent use of the terminology in lament may be seen as a deliberate correction to Job's excessive misuse of the same language in his previous speeches. Bildad's speech comes to an end with a prediction of the joyful prospect in store for Job and the disgraceful destiny of his enemies (Job 8:21-22). His language is verbally very close to Psalms 126:2a, the setting of which is associated with deliverance from calamity. Moreover, the depiction of the destruction of the psalmist's enemies is another common motif in lament. Ironically, the enemies, like Bildad and his other two friends, are sometimes described as persons who turn against the one who suffers because they take such suffering as proof of sin (Ps 35:11-15; 109:29). Again, Bildad appears to supply Job with the missing elements of a standard lament so as to rehabilitate his friend from his crisis of faith, as Bildad sees it.

Finally, Zophar assures Job of his future restoration if he will reorient his entire person to God and reform his moral behaviour (Job 11:13-14). The four conditions that Zophar specifies are 'directing his heart' toward God, 'spreading out his palms to God' in prayer, 'putting away wrongdoing from his hand' and 'letting no deceit reside in his tent'. Zophar's opinion about the appropriate behaviour in suffering further develops the tensions in the narrative. Although Job has been addressing God directly at this point, Zophar presumably does not consider Job's words as legitimate prayer. The reader is invited to negotiate the validity of this theological tradition endorsed by Zophar.

■ The speeches of Job in the first cycle of dialogue

In the dialogue with his three friends, Job presents his arguments against them on the one hand and seeks to convey his present anguish through various forms of religious language on the other. In his first speech, he

expresses his hope for God to crush him or cut him off (Job 6:8–9). To Job, the prosperous future promised by Eliphaz (cf. Job 4:6; 5:16) cannot offset the misery of existence. As Newsom (1996) rightly observes:

Job's wish for death (v. 9) turns the language of prayer upside down. It is not just death but specially death by divine violence that Job desires, parodying other psalmist who pray for God's hand to be lifted from them (Ps 32:4; 39:10[11]), who pray not to be cut off (Ps 88:5; Is 38:12), and who pray for relief from being crushed by God (Ps 38:2, 8[3, 9]). (p. 387)

Job's addressee appears to shift from his friends to God in Chapter 7. For the first time, he appeals to God directly and asks God to leave him alone in light of his fleeting life. Job's tonality turns sharper in the final section of this speech. He acknowledges that his speech is unrestrained because he is deeply grieved. He complains that God has been giving him too much attention and reiterates his preference for death over life. As a conclusion to this present speech, Job declares a confession of hypothetical sin, followed by a mock plea for God's forgiveness. His point is that neither his sin nor the forgiveness of his sin would be of much consequence to God in light of the ephemeral nature of his life.

While Chapter 6 develops the conflict between Job and his three friends, Chapter 7 intensifies the conflict between Job and God. Job extracts fragments of psalms of lament and forms expressions of sarcasm and parody against God. In terms of narrative progression, Job adopts Eliphaz's suggestion to seek God in prayer and addresses himself directly to God (cf. 5:8), but only in an ironic fashion. The third-person language of lament in Chapter 3 has now become a second-person face-to-face accusation in Chapter 7. The reader continues to feel the compulsion to form ethical judgements of Job. Job's poignant words indeed defy all the conventions of traditional religious language. He exposes the inadequacy of this language to express the sense of betrayal. To a certain extent, Job has invented another religious discourse, which is more provocative than any existing protest in Israelite prayer tradition. In so doing, he implicitly calls into question the assumption behind the language of lament. If the motivation for using this language is to ask God to reverse the psalmist's fortune after all, perhaps Satan is correct, and human beings do not fear God for nothing. Of course, the major tension remains whether the reader considers Job's new religious language as a legitimate expression of faith.

Job's next speech (chs. 9–10) occupies a critical point in the story. The major contribution is his introduction of the legal metaphor. In the Hebrew Bible, God at times enters into litigation with his people (e.g. Is 3:13–14; Mi 6:1–2) or argues the case of his people (e.g. Is 49:25b; Jr 50:34). There are also cases where God is said to enter into judgement with a person (e.g. Ps 143:2; Ec 11:9) or to argue the case of the psalmist (e.g. Ps 119:154a). The only instance in which a human being is depicted as pondering to

initiate litigation against God is found in Jeremiah 12:1. As Zuckerman (1991, p. 258) rightly notes, 'as soon as Jeremiah contemplates making a case against God [...] the prophet withdraws the motion, preferring instead to plead to God that He act to punish evildoers'.

In this speech, Job mimics the doxology genre suggested by Eliphaz (cf. Job 5:9-16) only to demonstrate the terror one will face when God becomes one's opponent in court. When Job applies Eliphaz's suggested reasons for praising God to his own situation, he maintains that God can neither be comprehended nor opposed. Job goes on to declare once again that he abhors his life, and so he dares to speak boldly. He imagines what he would say if he could confront God. Job would ask God not to declare him guilty but to give him a statement of the indictments. He would press God regarding the irrational nature of God's actions toward him. He would also complain that God cautiously created him only to find faults in him. Even if Job were innocent, he would still be the victim of God's ruthless aggression. Unlike Eliphaz, who uses the image of lions to elicit the association of God's just ordering of the world (cf. Job 4:10-11), Job depicts God as a lion, which, in the context of the lament language, represents the enemy of the innocent psalmist. Job concludes this speech by returning to the language of lament in Chapter 3 and Chapter 7; however, he does so with a heavier sense of despair. Whereas Job simply lamented the conditions of his birth in his opening outburst, he now decries his birth as actively orchestrated by God. He previously spoke of the impossible wish of never having seen the light (Job 3:16b); here, he speaks of his desire to not have been seen by any eye, which, by allusion, includes the divine 'Watching Eye'. In light of his short-lived life, Job asks God to leave him alone. His longing for death, which is described with multiple images of the darkness of Sheol, ends his speech.

In adopting the basic idea of the legal metaphor, Job attempts to explore a novel religious language to respond to his own situation. As soon as he picks up this forensic language, he realises its intrinsic logical weakness. In the legal metaphor elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, God 'is both an interested party in the lawsuit and the judge' (Roberts 1974, p. 164). To initiate litigation against God is to ask God to 'step down on this occasion from his conventional role as judge and instead take on the role of a colitigant - in fact, a defendant in a court case' (Zuckerman 1991, p. 111). Moreover, for an impartial trial between Job and God to exist, a third party other than God is needed to adjudicate Job's dispute with God.

In his last speech in the first cycle (chs. 12-14), Job continues to subvert Eliphaz's hymn of praise (cf. Job 5:9-16) and turn it into an anti-doxology that discloses the destructive intent of God's involvement in sustaining the natural, social, political and religious order of the world. Once again, Job initiates his direct address to God. His strategy is first 'to negotiate pretrial preliminaries with God' (Habel 1985, p. 231). Subsequently, he brings his

case to God as though a legal proceeding were, in fact, underway. Job's direct legal challenge to God again complicates the instabilities in the narrative. This time the conflict between Job and God is intensified. Considering that Job only speaks of God in the third person in his imaginary courtroom in his preceding speech (chs. 9-10), in this speech 'he unequivocally calls on God to provide the evidence on which God would justify his severity toward him' (Clines 1989, p. 337). Almost as soon as Job has begun to imagine speaking to God directly in the courtroom, however, he switches back to confronting God with the disproportionate divine treatment of him. Job turns next to invite God to consider the ephemerality and trouble of human life in general. Adapting Bildad's plant imagery, Job contrasts the hope of a tree with the hopelessness of mortals. Whereas plants can regenerate even when they are cut down and even when their roots grow old and die, human beings die and cannot come back to life. For Job, the finality of human death makes the friends' enthusiastic discussion of the topic of hope futile. Job turns next to explore the possibility of Sheol as a place for hope. However, in reality, God dashes the hope of every human being, just as the relentless erosion of water can destroy the most solid and resilient objects of nature. Job concludes his speech with the despairing note about the utter isolation accompanying death.

■ The speeches of the friends in the second and third cycles of dialogue

In the second cycle of dialogue, the primary content of the friends' words has transitioned from consolatory advice to supporting arguments in a wisdom disputation. Even though the friends continue to rebuke Job by criticising his boastful words in the exordium of their speeches, the rest of each of their speeches comprises a vivid description of the fate of the wicked (Job 15:20-35; 18:5-21; 20:4-29). As Westermann (1978, pp. 82-87) suggests, the sentiments in Job 15:20-35 resemble that of the 'end of the transgressor' motif in Psalms. In those Psalms, recalling this motif always serves as a means to elicit trust in God and response in righteous living. Taken as such, their depiction of the destruction of the wicked may still be considered a veiled attempt to redirect Job to place his trust in God and to amend his life.

In the first two cycles of dialogue, the sequence of speakers follows a regular and symmetrical pattern. This expectation is violated with the absence of Zophar's speech and Bildad's exceptionally short speech (ch. 25) in the third cycle. Moreover, the content of the speeches in this cycle presents interpretive difficulties. While the speeches of Job and the friends in the first two cycles exhibit clear distinctive standpoints, the speeches attributed to Job in this cycle contain materials that appear to be

more at home with the friends'. Many scholars believe that the third cycle originally contained the same sequence of speakers as the first two cycles. The present order has been variously explained.⁶⁴ Even if the disarray of the third cycle is intentional and its purpose is to signal to the reader that the dialogue between Job and the friends has reached an impasse, the speeches of the friends do not contribute much to the topic under study.

■ The speeches of Job in the second and third cycles of dialogue

Each of Job's speeches in the first cycle ends with an extended address to God (Job 7:7-21; 10:2-22; 13:20-14:22). From the second cycle, Job only briefly addresses God directly in his speeches. In the first speech in the second cycle, Job continues to express his conviction of God's unrelenting antagonism to him (Job 16:7-14). His depiction, a series of images of violent assault and humiliation, further develops some concepts and images that he has used earlier. Moreover, Job introduces new images in his expressions. For example, he declares that God has yielded [*Hiphil* of סגר] him to the wicked and the ruthless (v. 11). The closest parallel of the description in v. 11 is found in Lamentations 2:7, in which YHWH is said to have given [*Hiphil* of סגר] the walls of the palaces of Jerusalem into the hand of his enemy. Interestingly, the image of 'walls' is further developed by Job in the following context, in which God is described as a warrior running against and breaching Job, pictured as a city wall (v. 14). Job's depiction of God as גבור [mighty warrior] against him is striking. As Clines (1989, p. 385) observes, 'In every other passage where God is called a "mighty warrior" [גבור], it is his salvific power that is being hymned (Is 42:13; Jr 20:11; Zph 3:17; Ps 24:8; 78:65)'. The divine warrior, however, now fights against the one who laments. Job briefly addresses God directly in this speech (Job 17:3-4). The text here is, unfortunately, obscure. Perhaps 'Job's statement [in 17:3] is best understood as a claim that he is willing to place his own life in pledge in order to come before God and clear his name' (Newsom 1996, p. 461). Apparently, Job accuses God of acting as the active agent who shuts the minds of the mockers against him (Job 17:4). The reader will not hear Job's direct address to God until his final testimony (Job 30:20-21).

In his last speech in the second cycle (Chapter 21), Job enlarges his concern from the personal dimension to the broader topos of prosperity and lack of judgement for the wicked. Although he had made a similar observation earlier in passing (Job 12:6), his primary argument was the contradiction he

64. For example, Newsom (1996, p. 497) states that 'the present state of disarray is presumed to be the result either of unintentional scribal error or a deliberate attempt by a concerned copyist to put some traditionally pious words into the mouth of Job, borrowing them from the speeches of Bildad and Zophar'.

was experiencing between his integrity and how he had been treated as a laughingstock (Job 12:4-5). Now he offers a thorough investigation of the problem of the prosperity of the wicked and the lack of judgement for them. As Clines (2006, p. 536) puts it, '[t]he psalmists knew it was true, and they complained about it and asked God to stop it being true'. In this speech, Job asks, 'Why do the wicked live on, reach old age, and grow mighty in power?' (Job 21:7). He also asks, 'How often is the lamp of the wicked extinguished?' (Job 21:17a). These are disturbing religious questions that the psalmists touch peripherally at best (Newsom 1996, p. 494).

As mentioned earlier, the arrangement of speeches in the third cycle of dialogue is controversial. My reading strategy is to take them as presented in the Masoretic Text (MT). In Chapter 24, Job laments over the delayed judgement of the wicked. The first strophe describes the oppressed as asking for help: 'From the city the dying groan, and the throat of the wounded cries for help'.⁶⁵ This description is then followed by a statement expressing Job's perception of God's evaluation: *לֹא יִשִּׁים תְּפִלָּה וְאֵלֹהִים*. The MT vocalisation suggests that either God does not impute wrong, presumably, to the wicked (Hartley 1988, p. 349), or God does not consider the scenario as wrong (Habel 1985, p. 360). A slight revocalisation of the term *תְּפִלָּה* [folly, wrongdoing] to *תְּפִלָּה* [prayer] gives another plausible meaning.⁶⁶ In this alternative reading, the sense is that God does not pay attention to the prayer of the afflicted (Dhorme 1967, p. 361). Either way, Job claims that God is indifferent to social wickedness.

In Chapter 26, Job contemplates God's power in the created order. He begins with the terror with which the netherworld responds to God's appearance. In the form of a hymn, he then recounts God's powerful acts in creation. As Job continues, he praises God for having set a circle as a boundary to divide the upper world of the cosmos from the underworld. Job then turns his focus to the myth of the primordial battle in which God smote the cosmic sea monster Rahab and pierced the fleeing serpent. God's power and understanding caused even the pillars of Heaven, which are personified as bystanders, to tremble and be astounded. Job concludes his speech with a summative statement, followed by an exclamation and a rhetorical question: 'Behold, these are the outskirts of his way. What a whisper of a word [*שִׁמְעֵן דְּבַר*] do we hear of him! Who can understand the thunder of his might?' (v. 14). The first two cola aptly summarise the preceding description of the creative works of God (vv. 5-13). According to Job, they only reveal a fraction of God's sovereign acts. Job compares the

65. I follow the Syriac in reading *בְּמִית* as the plural participle of *בָּיַת*, 'dying', to establish a parallelism with 'wounded' in the following line. Nevertheless, the interpretation will not be impacted in a significant way if the MT reading is adopted.

66. This reading is supported by two Hebrew manuscripts.

faintness of God's revelation to שִׁמְעָן דָּבָר [a whisper of a word], a phrase that alludes to Eliphaz's vision in 4:12. As Good (1990) puts it:

That whisper is but a ghost of the real 'thunder'. Those who are privy only to a tiny corner of the god's power cannot draw conclusions from what is beyond understanding. (p. 286)

In so saying, Job dismantles the friends' claims to special revelation. This strategy, in turn, contributes to the dissolution of the dialogue between Job and them.

In his next speech (ch. 27), Job invokes a curse against his enemy and his adversary. In psalms of lament, it is common for the psalmist to refer to his opponents collectively as 'my enemy' (אֵיבִי; Ps 13:3, 5 [ET 2, 4]; 18:18 [ET 17]; 41:12 [ET 11]) or 'the enemy' (אֹיֵב; Ps 7:6 [ET 5]; 31:9 [ET 9]; 42:10 [ET 9]; 43:2; 64:2 [ET 1]; 143:3). Job appears to adapt terminology from standard formulae found in lament psalms and use it as an innuendo for the friends. A similar practice is employed by the friends in the second cycle to insinuate that Job is becoming the 'wicked'. Job seems to be applying what the friends have done to him to themselves. To end this strophe, Job moves on to describe the hopelessness of the typical godless person before God. His tone continues to be ironic. As Job, who is righteous, receives no response from God, his hope seems to be no different from that of the godless one. Moreover, Job picks up the phrase 'take delight in Shaddai' (עַל־יְשׁוּעָה + *hithpael* of עָנַג) and the motif of answered prayer, which are two of the incentives for Job to submit to God according to Eliphaz (cf. Job 22:26–27), but sets them in the context of a pair of rhetorical questions in Verse 10. In so doing, Job exposes the contradiction inherent in Eliphaz's words. As Job argues, the godless one simply demonstrates no interest in God or calling upon him. If Job is one of the impious, according to their assessment, then Eliphaz's assurance that he will 'take delight in Shaddai' and have his prayer answered would be no incentive to him at all.

■ The wisdom poem and Job's testimony

Due to the unique style and tonality of the extended poem in Chapter 28, most interpreters do not attribute this speech to Job.⁶⁷ The majority regard this chapter as an independent poem—composed by the same author of the preceding wisdom dialogue or inserted by a later scribe – which serves as a reflective interlude between the dialogue between Job and the friends and the latter part of the work. Another suggestion, which comes independently

67. The remark of Clines (2006, p. 908) is representative: 'Chapter 28 is almost universally denied to Job [...] The consensus of scholarly opinion is that Chapter 28 is an independent poem, not set in the mouth of any of the speakers of the book of Job'.

from Greenstein (2003, pp. 269–272) and Clines (2004, pp. 243–253), is to attribute this poem to Elihu. Both of them buttress their corresponding proposals by showing linguistic and thematic correspondences between Chapter 28 and Chapters 32–37. In light of prevailing allusions in this book, affinities in language or motif between two passages do not necessarily imply that they belong to the same speaker. It seems to me that the meaning of the poem changes according to the context, which the interpreter supplies for Chapter 28. Therefore, if one believes that it is an independent poem or part of the speeches of Elihu, the poem does make sense accordingly. No matter what reading strategy one adopts, the poem does not appear to contribute much to the topic of prayer.

Job speaks up again in Job 29:1, and the three friends do not appear to be his addressees. He recalls the good old days of being respected (ch. 29) and then expresses the misery of his present condition (ch. 30). Together, the two chapters resemble the complaint portion of an individual lament, reciting the two contrasting periods of Job's life in extreme terms. Once again, Job addresses his complaint to God directly in this speech (Job 30:20–23). Regarding the narrative's progression, it is important to note that the first two parts of Job's final testimony are focused solely on the reversal of his social status. As Girard (1987) rightly points out:

The contrast between past and present is not from riches to poverty, or from health to sickness, but from favour to disfavour with the very same people. The dialogues are not dealing with a purely personal drama or a simple change of circumstance, but with the behaviour of all the people towards a statesman whose career has been destroyed. (p. 12)

This highlights the social alienation a person feels when one is not living according to the cultural norm.

Job turns next to compile a comprehensive inventory of sins, of which he is claiming to be guiltless, in the form of oaths and another appeal to God for a hearing (Job 31:5–40). Protestation of innocence appears to be part of Job's ongoing practices throughout his earlier speeches (Job 9:21; 12:4; 13:15–16; 16:17; 19:25–27; 23:10–12; 27:2–6). The emphasis of the oaths on his inner attitudes and motives recalls the doubt that Satan raises regarding Job's motivation for piety and morality in the prologue (Job 1:9–11; 2:4–5). Moreover, these oaths are also rhetoric of barbed or blunt provocation. As Habel (1985, pp. 430–431) puts it, 'The hidden agenda in Job's glowing self-portrait seems to be that his adversary at law, the mighty Shaddai, had not matched the consistency of Job's righteousness'.

■ The Elihu speeches

Some (Althann 1999, p. 11; Wilson 1996, p. 86) have rightly observed that Elihu is different from the three friends in that he is not interested in the

sins of Job's former life but focuses exclusively on the words Job spoke amidst his suffering. The fact that Elihu is the only speaker who extensively cites the words of Job strengthens this observation. The narrator's description of Elihu's attitude toward Job and the friends aptly encapsulates the feeling of a typical member of the audience at this point of the narrative. One is likely to be dissatisfied with the arguments made by the friends and be offended by the provocative complaints uttered by Job.

Regarding prayer, Elihu first affirms that God hears the cry of the oppressed in his second speech (Job 34:28). In his next speech (ch. 35), Elihu turns to address the issue of God's reluctance to respond to the cries of the afflicted. Elihu begins to explain that the cries of some oppressed people go unanswered because of their own pride (vv. 9–13). While Job suggests that the animals and the birds can teach humans about God's arbitrariness (cf. Job 12:11), Elihu makes God the teacher and the animals and birds vehicles of divine communication. Humans in distress should imitate them to cry to God for help. Elihu then applies the same principle to Job's particular case with an alleged citation of Job's boastful words (vv. 14–15). His purpose is to disqualify Job's cry as a legitimate form of speaking to God.

■ The divine speeches and Job's responses

The eventual appearance of YHWH in a tempest indicates that the narrative is coming to an end. According to the narrative sequence, YHWH speaks twice (Job 38:1–40:2; 40:6–41:34), and each of the divine speeches is immediately followed by a brief response from Job (40:3–5; 42:1–6). The first divine speech is sandwiched by YHWH's challenge to Job in forensic terms, indicating that one of the main purposes is to disqualify Job from pursuing his lawsuit against God (Greenstein 1996, pp. 241–258). YHWH's leading question to Job is: 'Who is this that darkens my scheme with words without knowledge?' (Job 38:2). On one hand, the divine concern refers back to Job's opening outcry in which Job uses the 'darkness' motif to subvert the language of creation (Perdue 1991, p. 203). On the other hand, they also recall Job's words at Job 12:12–25, in which Job accuses God of disorienting the world with darkness (Janzen 1985, p. 231).

The bulk of YHWH's first speech is concerned with cosmogony (Job 38:4–21), meteorology (Job 38:22–38) and zoology (Job 38:39–39:30). As many (Fishbane 1971, pp. 153–155; Good 1990, p. 205; Perdue 1987, pp. 295–315) have noted, Job's opening outburst is a subversion of the 'creation' motif in Genesis 1–2. Alter (1984, pp. 34–38) has convincingly demonstrated that one of the functions of the cosmogony lesson is to subvert the language in Job's opening malediction. Whereas YHWH criticises Job's prayer of protest at the narrative level, YHWH appears to

endorse Job's chaotic language implicitly at the rhetorical level. For example, regarding the control of the sea (Job 38:8-11), Newsom (1996) argues that:

[7]he chaotic waters have a place in God's design of the cosmos, yet one that is clearly circumscribed. They are the object not only of divine restriction but also of divine care. (p. 602)

Similarly, Balentine (2006) writes:

In sum, when Job looks upon the surging waters of the sea, God invites him to understand that when any part of creation threatens to exceed the limitations of what is permitted, it may be *constrained*, but it is not *condemned*. (p. 647)

Interestingly, Job has compared himself to the sea in one of his speeches (Job 7:12). The reader is thus invited to make such an association.

Job's response to the first divine speech is brief (Job 40:4-5). He uses the verb קלתי [I am small] to depict himself and admits that he is not able to answer God. He also describes his silence figuratively with the 'hand-on-the mouth' symbol. To my knowledge, all interpreters see Job as responding with the gesture of laying his hand over his mouth. It is, however, equally likely that Job is using the 'hand-over-the mouth' symbol as a figurative way to express his silence since Chapter 32. Job has already stopped speaking. This fits the following context well, in which he declares that he has already spoken and has nothing to add. Some (Muenchow 1989, pp. 608-609; Newsom 1996, p. 613) understand Job's response as an indication of his self-humiliation. According to this reading, the divine honour has overwhelmed Job into recognising his own smallness in status. Nevertheless, as Perdue (1991, pp. 216-217) rightly observes:

In each use of the Qal form the verb clearly means 'to be held in contempt' by another person or group (Gn 16.4, 5; 2 Sm 1.23; Jr 4.13; Hab 1.8; Nah 1.4). It does not indicate personal remorse, repentance, or self-deprecation. (pp. 216-217)

Therefore, Job's wording may express his assessment of how God evidently regards him rather than his self-evaluation. Besides, as Gruber (1980, pp. 1: 289-290) points out, the hand-over-the mouth gesture itself signifies no more than silence and that any connotations, such as reverence or astonishment, are supplied by the context. Taking everything into consideration, Job's first response is, at best, an ambiguous one. The conflict between Job and God still remains, and this makes room for the second divine speech.

The presence of the second divine speech implicitly implies that YHWH is not satisfied with Job's silence. After a similar challenge to Job in legal terms, YHWH introduces two creatures, Behemoth and Leviathan, into the dialogue. YHWH created these not only as wonders of nature but also as chaotic creatures that he alone is able to subdue. Taken as such, Behemoth and Leviathan are symbolisations of 'chaos' or 'evil forces'. Surprisingly, YHWH does not display any hostility against Leviathan or Behemoth.

Rather, YHWH praises their strength and physical features, thus implying that God not only controls chaos but also takes delight in the beauty of these chaotic forces in the created order (Nel 1991, p. 222).

Interestingly, YHWH invites Job to compare himself to Behemoth (Job 40:15). In his opening outcry, Job urges those who can rouse Leviathan to curse the day of his birth. This mythological monster symbolises the chaotic force Job wants to bring forth in an imaginary past. In the present divine speech, YHWH recalls this monster from Job's malediction in Job 3:8 only to claim that he is able to cohabit with chaos.

Similar to what follows the first divine speech, Job speaks up a final time and offers his response to YHWH (Job 42:2-6). Job's words in Verses 3a and 4 are almost universally regarded as his citations of YHWH's former words. Taken as such, v. 3b is conventionally understood as Job's humble confession of having spoken inappropriately. However, no obvious marker for an attributed quotation can be found in either case. As I have argued elsewhere, since attributed quotations are always marked elsewhere in the book, it is preferable to read these verses rather as allusions or echoes (Ho 2009, pp. 703-715). If both Verses 3a and 4 represent Job's own sentiment, his tone is still in the protesting mode. Most have argued that Verse 5 represents a contrast between Job's previous and present knowledge, even though this interpretation has been called into question (Clines 2011, pp. 1216-1217). In the Hebrew Bible, any personal encounter with God brings certain risk, even to the point of death (Ex 33:20; Jdg 13:22). In fact, from his earlier speeches (Job 13:15, 19; 19:25; 23:15-17), Job is aware of the fact that he will die when he contends with God. Here, he can merely highlight the embedded danger when a person meets with YHWH face-to-face.

Finally, we come to the most intriguing verse (v. 6), in which almost every word raises questions. As Tilley (1989, p. 258) puts it, 'at crucial points, the text of the book is so indeterminate that the "text" of Job is, to a significant extent, made, not found'. While many have interpreted this verse as Job's submission, other interpretive options are available. For example, the expression could indicate that Job sees himself as eventually receiving consolation, albeit ironically, as he approaches death (Krüger 2007, p. 219). Perhaps the vagueness of the verse should permit this double entendre.⁶⁸ As far as the instabilities in the narrative are concerned, the conflict between Job, God and the three friends has not been resolved. The decisive factor now becomes YHWH's final verdict, as presented in the next few verses.

68. Morrow (1986, pp. 211-225) is even able to construct three meanings out of the words in Job 42:6.

■ The final divine verdict and the epilogue

Before concluding the story with the restored state of the life of Job by YHWH (Job 42:10-17), the narrator describes the divine verdict on the words spoken by the three friends. YHWH tells Eliphaz that he is angry with him and his two friends (Job 42:7). The mention of divine anger indicates that the following words serve as a rebuke. Interestingly, the construction of the divine verdict in Job 42:7-8 is comparable to that of the Deuteronomist's evaluation of some of the kings of Judah in the book of Kings. Just as the conduct of the Judean kings is judged using David as the standard (1 Ki 11:6, 33; 15:11; 2 Ki 14:3; 16:2), the words of the three friends are judged using those of Job as the norm. At this point, the reader is confronted with the tension between YHWH's condemnation of Job's words in the divine speeches on the one hand and YHWH's indirect commendation of Job's words here on the other.

One interpretive option is to retain the conventional meaning of the preposition **על** 'to' (Oeming 2000, pp. 103-116). Even though **על** and **אל** appear to be used interchangeably at times and **אל** can occasionally convey the meaning of 'concerning' (cf. 1 Sm 3:12; 1 Ki 16:12), it is used in the conventional sense with the verb **דבר** in Job 2:13; 4:2; 5:8; 13:3; 42:7a; and 42:9 (Ngwa 2005, p. 12). The contrast between the three friends and Job will thus be that Job spoke to God from time to time in his speeches while the friends never spoke directly to God in their speeches.

Alternatively, some interpret Job's words that God commends as a subset of his overall dialogue with his friends. Janzen (1985, p. 264), for example, maintains that the words are limited to Job's 'expressions of hope' and 'enactments of free self-binding' by oath. For Clines (2011, p. 1231), 'what YHWH can and does accept is [Job's claim] that he does not govern the world according to the dictates of retributive justice'. Another option is to divert the attention to a certain aspect of Job's speeches. Pope (1973, p. 350), for instance, places emphasis on Job's integrity, thus interpreting Job 42:7 as signifying 'that God values the integrity of the impatient protester and abhors pious hypocrites who would heap accusations on a tormented soul to uphold their theological position' Cooper (1986, p. 420), on the other hand, focuses on Job's questioning attitude as the key. A handful of scholars (Fohrer 1963, p. 539; Whybray 1998, pp. 172-173) still argue that the words of God in Job 42:7 refer to Job's response(s) to God near the end of the story.

Regarding the interpretation of Job 2:7-8, Wolfers (1995, p. 462) insightfully states, 'It is open to every interpreter to state his own opinion as to what it was that Job said which drew this remark from the LORD'. At the narrative level, the openness of YHWH's verdict allows each reader to

supply the necessary information to fill the gap in order to bring proper closure. At the rhetorical level, the text invites the reader to evaluate one's own conviction on what constitutes a legitimate prayer in the midst of suffering throughout this reading journey. Ironically, in the end, the friends are commanded by YHWH to seek Job's intercession, and it is Job's prayer that YHWH ultimately accepts (Job 42:8-9).

■ Conclusion

Prayer is a central theme in the book of Job. The artistry in the work strongly suggests that the text does not intend to present a monological argument on this topic. The reader is invited to form various and even conflicting judgements on various aspects of prayer. Conventional prayer forms found in the Psalms and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible have often been brought up and re-evaluated. The interaction between the friends and Job has demonstrated that prayer is not only a personal theological issue but also a social matter. This phenomenon is not limited to the ancient world but is also very evident in the modern faith community.

Prayer in Lamentations

Gideon R Kotzé

Research Focus Area Ancient Texts: Text, Context, and Reception,
Faculty of Theology, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa

■ Introduction

The ancient world possessed a rich store of various types of laments that would repay more detailed investigations by modern researchers who are interested in the theologies of the distant past.⁶⁹ The five poems in the versions of the book of Lamentations that were circulated in antiquity number among these artefacts. They have a lot in common with other laments from the ancient Near East and Mediterranean,⁷⁰ including their ideas about the divine and the fact that prayer, which involves intentional verbal and non-verbal communication with deities,⁷¹ plays a part in some of them. That being said, prayer is hardly the definitive characteristic of the poems of Lamentations. Only Lamentations 5 is formulated as an address to the deity from beginning to end, and Lamentations 4 does not appear to

69. See, for example, Alexiou (2002), Delnero (2020), Enmarch (2013, pp. 83–99), Gabbay (2014), Gabbay (2020, pp. 121–138), Hallo (1995, pp. 1871–1881), Löhnert (2011, pp. 402–417), and Suter (ed. 2008).

70. Dobbs-Allsopp (1993, pp. 30–96), Gwaltney (1991, pp. 242–265), Kruger (2012, pp. 395–413).

71. See the discussion on the definition of prayer in Balentine (1993, pp. 30–32) and the broad sense of the term in Balentine (2000, p. 1077).

How to cite: Kotzé, GR 2023, 'Prayer in Lamentations', in AJ Coetsee & FP Viljoen (eds.), *Biblical Theology of prayer in the Old Testament*, Reformed Theology in Africa Series, vol. 12, AOSIS Books, Cape Town, pp. 147–157. <https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2023.BK417.09>

contain any communication with the divine.⁷² In the prayer passages of the rest of the poems, different characters speak to YHWH in the second person,⁷³ encourage other characters to call on YHWH⁷⁴ or mention that they prayed to YHWH.⁷⁵ Some of the passages refer to the lifting of hands as a gesture of prayer.⁷⁶ Although the poems of Lamentations are not exactly synonymous with prayer,⁷⁷ the passages where characters communicate with YHWH exemplify several features that dictate the wordings of the poems and are important for the interpretation thereof. These passages have something to say to audiences about the poems' God-talk and speak to their significance for theological discourse.

The aim of this chapter is not to provide an extensive investigation of all the prayer passages in the poems of Lamentations or an exhaustive discussion of the perspectives on YHWH that lie behind them.⁷⁸ The goal is rather to introduce the topic of prayer in Lamentations and to make a few suggestions that might point the way forward for future studies on the theological side of the subject. This chapter, therefore, takes the form of a short survey in which I, firstly, offer brief interpretive comments on a selection of the prayer passages of Lamentations. I then identify a handful of features that influence the wordings of the prayer passages and the perspectives they present. In a concluding section, I indicate how these features might also be relevant to research on the theological contributions of the prayer passages in the poems of Lamentations.

■ Interpretive comments on selected prayer passages of Lamentations

When it comes to the topic of prayer, the final poem, Lamentations 5, is the centrepiece of the collection. Several manuscripts of more than one ancient

72. Goldingay (2021, p. 149) also remarks on the absence of prayer in Lamentations 4.

73. See, for example, Lamentations 1:7 (Qumran manuscript [4QLam]), 9, 10, 11, 20-22; 2:20-22; 3:23, 42-45, 52-66.

74. See, for example, Lamentations 2:18-19; 3:41.

75. See, for example, Lamentations 3:8, 55-56.

76. See, for example, Lamentations 2:19; 3:41.

77. Contrast the view of Westermann (1994, p. 86) that the poems of the book of Lamentations are laments that 'were intended to be heard, first and foremost, by the One to whom they were directed as prayers, by the One who is directly addressed in them: God'. He insists that all Old Testament laments, including the book of Lamentations are addressed to God, even when it is not explicitly stated that they are directed toward the deity (Westermann 1994, p. 91).

78. For the purposes of this chapter, I make no mention of the reception of the poems of Lamentations in Jewish and Christian liturgies and worship (see e.g. Cameron-Mowat 2011, pp. 139-141; Parry 2011, pp. 175-197; Stern 2011, pp. 88-91). I also leave out of consideration modern approaches to Lamentations that treat the poems as models for prayer.

translation even give the poem the title of a prayer, or more specifically, a prayer of the prophet Jeremiah. The poem has some of the hallmarks of a communal lament. The community who speaks in the first-person plural calls on the name of YHWH (v. 1), they complain about the disasters they had experienced (vv. 2-18), and they petition YHWH to act on their behalf (vv. 19-22). Although the words of the community are addressed to YHWH, in reality, they are intended for the ears of the audiences for whom the poem was transmitted in writing. The poem embodies a particular religious tradition, the transmission of the poem helps in a small way to keep that tradition alive, and the audiences stand in the same tradition. The format of the poem as a prayer from the past is a rhetorical device that allows audiences to look at what the community says to YHWH and asks of God with the advantage of hindsight.

In the opening verse, the community pleads with YHWH to recall what had happened to them and to learn from them the disgrace they have suffered. These directives invite audiences to think back to the time of the community and to see in their mind's eye the disgrace their ancestors had to endure. The dramatic images in Verses 2-18 enable the audiences to mentally visualise their ancestors' fall from grace. The community complains that a multitude of calamities had befallen them and that they were helpless to do anything about it.⁷⁹ As if the disasters were not bad enough, their powerlessness to prevent it all from happening made the situation worse. The theme of the community's powerlessness continues in the final strophes of the poem (Lm 5):⁸⁰

(But) you, O YHWH, sit enthroned forever; your throne is for all generations. Why should you forget us enduringly? (Why) should you abandon us for length of days? Turn us back to you, O YHWH, so that we may return; renew our days as of old, because⁸¹ you did indeed reject us; you were exceedingly angry with us. (vv. 19-22)

The community was obviously not in a strong position. YHWH's rejection and anger were the reasons why the community could not repair the relationship with God, and they had no other option than to ask the angry deity who rejected them to mend their fences. Clearly, YHWH held all the power in the relationship. The community could not force the eternal divine king⁸² to give them what they wanted. All they were able to do was pray. The message of the

79. See, for example, Kotzé (2020a, pp. 29-42, 92-94) and Kotzé (2021b, pp. 192-193).

80. The translations of the passages from Lamentations are my own.

81. I follow here the interpretation reflected by the Septuagint and Peshitta translations.

82. The picture of YHWH enthroned forever in Verse 19 forms an effective contrast with the scene of foxes trampling over desolate Mount Zion in Verse 18. This image of animals who represent chaos taking over YHWH's earthly abode, the pinnacle of civilisation, is a striking example of the *mundus inversus* theme (Kotzé 2020a, pp. 39-41). The contrast implies that YHWH's rule remained intact even when the community's world turned upside down. The chaos at the centre of civilisation upset the community but not the divine order signified by YHWH's eternal throne.

prayer, however, was aimed at human audiences. The mention of YHWH's throne that remains for generation upon generation implies that it was firmly in place at the time of each audience. The rule of YHWH did not cease during the days of the poem's community. Those days also did not see the end of the people of God. The audiences of the poem belong to future generations of the same people. Given that the future generations are still part of the people of God, the audiences are living proof that YHWH did not finally dissolve God's relationship with their ancestors at some point in history. When the community asks YHWH to renew their days as God had done in antiquity, the audiences know that the community who speaks the prayer in the poem is another in a long line of generations with whom YHWH continued a relationship and that they share in that relationship. There is evidence that YHWH did get angry and even rejected God's people in days gone by, to be sure, but YHWH has never completely given up on them. The composition of the poem and its repeated transmission in writing, which made it possible to reach different audiences who adhered to the same ongoing religious tradition as the poem, manifest the idea that YHWH has not forgotten or abandoned God's people once and for all in the past. The nature of the poem as a literary and cultural artefact that was meant to be preserved and its transmission in multiple manuscripts are, therefore, part of the message.

One of the standout features of the prayer passages in the poems of Lamentations is that the praying voices belong to more than one character. There are even cases where different versions of the same poem put the prayers in the mouths of different characters. For instance, in the version of Lamentations 1 represented by the Masoretic Text (MT), an anonymous speaker observes that Jerusalem called to mind her age-old valuables⁸³ during a particularly unhappy period in her past (Lm 1):

Jerusalem remembered, in the days of her affliction and wandering,⁸⁴ all her precious things, which existed from days of old. When her people fell in the hand

83. Almost precisely the same phrase ('all her precious things') is used in Lamentations 1:10, where it most probably refers to the furnishings and utensils of the temple in Jerusalem and the treasures that were deposited there (Frevel 2017, pp. 115-116; Kotzé 2021a, pp. 98-99).

84. 'Wandering' is here a symptom of a negative emotional state. Barré (2001, pp. 177-187) identifies passages from several ancient Near Eastern texts, including Lamentations 1:7 and 3:19, where wandering about is a *topos* of depression. There are several instances in Mesopotamian laments where goddesses are said to wander about in despair (see e.g. Cohen 1988, p. 59: 'She walks about stooped over in her house. She cries bitterly. She walks about [aimlessly] in her defiled cella. She cries bitterly. She walks about [aimlessly] in her levelled treasure house. She cries bitterly'; Cohen 1988, pp. 244, 246: 'You, the lady, wander about aimlessly. You do not sleep'. 'She wanders about. She wanders about. In the house, she wanders about. She goes around. She goes around. In her [city], she goes around'). The *topos* also appears more than once in the Babylonian creation myth, *Enūma eliš*. A good example is the merism in I, 57-58 which expresses the utter despair of the deities: 'The gods heard it [*the plot against them*] and were frantic [lit. they wandered about]. They were overcome with silence and sat quietly'. See also I, 109, 118-119, IV, 63, 64 (Lambert 2013, pp. 53, 57, 89). Another noteworthy passage is found in the Standard Babylonian version of the Gilgameš epic (IX, 1-5): 'For his friend, Enkidu Gilgameš was weeping bitterly as he roamed the wild: "I shall die, and shall I not then be like Enkidu? Sorrow has entered my heart. I became afraid of death, so go roaming the wild"' (George 2003, p. 667).

of a foe and there was no helper for her, foes saw her; they laughed about her downfall. (v. 7; MT)

A common element of different types of laments is the contrast between the past and the present.⁸⁵ The MT's version of Lamentations 1:7 exhibits a modified form of this motif. The verse looks back to a bad time when the consequences of the catastrophe that befell Jerusalem were still present and the personified city thought about 'the good things she had in the good old days' (Salters 2010, p. 58). The implication appears to be that the city's precious things, which were in her possession for ages, were lost when the disaster struck. This loss, together with the loss of her people, went hand in hand with the collapse of the city. The *Schadenfreude* of Jerusalem's foes, who witnessed what happened to the city while no one came to her aid, added insult to her injury. The contrast between Jerusalem's happy circumstances that existed for a long time in the distant past, represented by what was lost but not forgotten, and her unhappy situation at the time made the joy felt by the foes at the misfortune of the city sting even more. From this perspective, the verse looks forward to the final part of the poem where personified Jerusalem says a prayer against all her enemies, who did wrong [רעה] by rejoicing at the misery [רעה] YHWH caused the city to experience with no one to comfort her. Jerusalem wishes to God that they share her fate (Lm 1:21-22).⁸⁶ She prays that YHWH will act justly by doing to her enemies as the deity had done to her by punishing them for all their wrongdoing, as the deity had punished her for all her transgressions. If YHWH listens to Jerusalem and fulfils her wish by treating the enemies and the city in the same way and giving them their deserved comeuppance as she got her just deserts, the deity would do right by her and thereby behave differently towards the city than the enemies, who did her wrong.

In the Qumran manuscript (4QLam), the contrast motif of Lamentations 1:7 is transformed into a prayer voiced by the character who has been speaking up to this point in the poem. The speaker prays to YHWH about the long-term suffering of his people, which is linked to the downfall of the city and her helpless inhabitants, as well as the pleasure foes derived from it (4QLam Lm 1):⁸⁷

85. See, for example, Alexiou (2002, pp. 165-171), Dobbs-Allsopp (1993, pp. 38-40) and Jahnow (1923, p. 99).

86. This type of wish for vengeance (which is actually a curse) is another common element of laments. See, for example, Alexiou (2002, pp. 178-181) and Jahnow (1923, pp. 98-99).

87. For the text of Qumran manuscript [4QLam] and examinations of its wording and content, see Cross (2000, pp. 232-233), Kotzé (2013, pp. 41-52) and Schäfer (2004, pp. 113*-115*).

Remember O YHWH [a]! our pain that existed from days of old. When her [people] fell in the hand of a foe and there was no helper, her foes laughed about [] her ruins. (v. 7)

Whereas in the MT, the personified city pleads with YHWH to see the affliction caused by her enemies and that she feels that she has become worthless (Lm 1:9, 11), it is the speaker, not the city, who says these words in Qumran manuscript [4QLam].⁸⁸

Lamentations 3:7-9 is an example of a stanza where a speaker (in this case, a 'man' [גבר]), tells the audiences how he prayed during a time of divinely imposed distress:

He walled me in, and I could not get out, he made heavy my bronze (wall).⁸⁹
What is worse, every time I called out and cried for help, he blocked my prayer.⁹⁰
He walled up my ways with hewn stone,⁹¹ my paths he made crooked. (vv. 7-9)

He kept crying out, calling for divine help, says the speaker, but it was to no avail because YHWH made sure that his prayers never reached the deity.⁹² The idea that the speaker's prayers hit a brick wall is not only conveyed by

88. For a discussion of the fragmentary wording of Qumran manuscript [4QLam] and how it agrees and disagrees with the Masoretic version of the prayers in vv. 9 and 11, see Kotzé (2013, pp. 63, 68-70).

89. Ancient translations such as the Peshitta, the Vulgate and the two versions of the Targum interpret 'bronze' in Verse 7 as a reference to fetters. This is a viable understanding of the unvocalised Hebrew text, and many modern scholars adopt it (e.g. Bailey 2016, p. 125; Berges 2002, p. 190; Goldingay 2022, p. 132; King 2012, p. 196; Koenen 2015, p. 230; Renkema 1998, pp. 361-362; Salters 2010, pp. 200-201). Another possibility is that the third colon of the line parallels the first one and alludes to a heavy or sturdy bronze wall. The image of a bronze or copper wall is found in several ancient Near Eastern texts in different languages. For example, the third of six hymns to Senwosret III (1881-1840 BCE) praises the Egyptian king for his greatness and calls him 'a walled rampart of copper of Sinai' (Lichtheim 2006, p. 199), while inscriptions on the columns of the Great Hypostyle Hall at Karnak describe Seti I (1296-1279 BCE) as 'the great surrounding wall of copper' (Kitchen 1975, p. 204). Among the Amarna correspondence, is a letter from the ruler of Tyre, Abi-Milku, to the Egyptian king in which he refers to his lord as 'a bronze wall that was erected for him' (Rainey 2015, p. 744).

90. There is some debate over the interpretation of the verb in the second colon of Verse 8. Several scholars explain שָׁחַ with the help of an Arabic word with the meaning 'disappointed, frustrated (a person's wish or request)' (e.g. Albretson 1963, p. 132; Barth 1893, p. 9; Driver 1950, p. 139; Gottlieb 1978, p. 40; Renkema 1998, p. 363). I, however, follow the lead of the Septuagint and other ancient translations and understand the form שָׁחַ as a variant spelling of שָׁחַ (this verb appears in several Hebrew manuscripts).

91. Baumann (2005, pp. 139-145) suggests that the hewn stone in this context alludes to the walls of the temple and city that have been destroyed. This destruction was a real blow to Zion theology because the walls symbolised the city's protection, and the temple was the earthly abode of Jerusalem's divine protector. In the wall metaphor of Lamentations 3:7-9, the ruins that remained after the destruction of the buildings represent an inescapable prison YHWH built for Zion. I prefer the interpretation of Hillers (1992, p. 127), who notes that hewn stone was used 'only in the finest, most substantial buildings in ancient Israel', and it is specified here as the building material of the divinely constructed obstacle 'to indicate that God has walled the man in as solidly as possible'. Indeed, a wall of dressed stone is durable, a quality it shares with a bronze wall, and both images conjure up the idea of impenetrability.

92. See also the image of YHWH's inaccessibility in Lamentations 3:44, 'You have covered yourself with a cloud so that prayer cannot pass through'.

the words of Verse 8 but also by the arrangement of the three lines of the stanza so that the one about the speaker's failure to communicate with YHWH is boxed in by the spatial metaphors in the two surrounding lines. The confinement metaphors in Verse 7 indicate that YHWH trapped the speaker in distress with no way of escape. The speaker was powerless to change the distressful situation on his own and the failed attempts to get in touch with YHWH he mentions in Verse 8 also mean that he was unable to find relief through divine assistance. In fact, the impeded journey metaphors in Verse 9 imply that, instead of aiding the speaker, YHWH, who caused his distress, compounded it as well. The images of blocked ways and winding roads have to do with the hindering of free and direct movement and convey the idea that YHWH rendered it impossible for the speaker to make progress out of his dire circumstances.⁹³ Faced with such obstacles and no way to gain a hearing for his pleas, the speaker had nowhere to go and therefore remained in his distress.

YHWH, however, does not only cause distress in Lamentations 3; the deity delivers from it as well. In Lamentations 3:52-66,⁹⁴ the speaker recounts how his enemies persecuted him without provocation and threatened his life. He was helpless, unable to extricate himself from the mortal danger he was in, and he felt forsaken by God (vv. 52-54). When the helpless and godforsaken speaker hit rock bottom, he prayed for help from above. YHWH answered his prayer and promptly arrived in person to save him (Lm 3):

I called on your name, O YHWH, from the lowest parts of the cistern.⁹⁵
 You heard my voice⁹⁶: 'Do not cover your ear for my cry for rescue!'
 You came near on the day that I called on you; you said: 'Do not fear!' (vv. 55-57)

93. See also Eidevall (2005, pp. 135-136). The Akkadian poem, Man and his God, uses the comparable journey metaphors of an open way and a straight path to describe God-given relief from distress. The poem deals with the relationship between human suffering and divinity (Lenzi 2019, p. 172). In the section that narrates the deity's response to the sufferer, the god speaks the following comforting words: 'You experienced distress, but my [...] is withdrawn: You have borne its heavy load to its completion. People have [...] you, but (now) the way is open for you, Your path is straight and compassion is bestowed on you' (ll. 52-55) (Lambert 1987, p. 193). The same metaphors reappear at the end of the tablet in the closing liturgical formula: 'Make straight his way, open his path, May the prayer of your servant sink into your mind' (ll. 68) (Lambert 1987, p. 195).

94. The speaker addresses YHWH, but this account of persecution, deliverance and plea for justice is actually for the benefit of human audiences. For a more detailed discussion of the passage, see Kotzé (2020b, pp. 99-125).

95. In the thought-world of the ancient Near East, cisterns were associated with graves and entrances to the underworld (Keel 1997, p. 70). In Verse 55, 'the lowest parts of the cistern' stand for the deepest bowels of Sheol where the speaker was farthest removed from YHWH.

96. Although a few scholars read the verb of the first colon of Verse 56 as a precative *qatal* (Berlin 2002, p. 83; Hillers 1992, p. 118; Provan 1991, pp. 164-175), I do not think that the context of the verse requires such an interpretation.

The speaker describes the divine deliverance as just (v. 58), as opposed to the injustice of the enemies whose antagonism towards him was undeserved (v. 52). YHWH was an eyewitness to their slander and schemes against the speaker (vv. 59–63), and he requests the deity to assume the role of judge (v. 59) and executioner (v. 66). YHWH was just when God rescued the speaker from his plight, and he wants God to act justly again by meting out the punishment he thinks the enemies rightly deserve (vv. 64–66).⁹⁷

Lamentations 3:40–41 is an interesting instance where the speaker encourages people to pray by referring to the gesture of raised hands (Lm 3):⁹⁸

Let us examine and explore our ways and let us return to YHWH.
Let us lift up our heart on palms to God in the heavens. (vv. 40–41)

Given the dire straits they were in as a result of divine punishment,⁹⁹ the speaker calls on others to join him in examining their ways and, realising

97. Interestingly, in Lamentations 1, personified Jerusalem wishes that YHWH would be just and treat her enemies in the same way as the deity had treated her (vv. 21–22). By contrast, in Lamentations 3, the man prays that YHWH would be just and deal with his enemies in the opposite way from how the deity had dealt with him. Unlike the man, who experienced YHWH's comforting presence and rescue from the threat to his life (vv. 55–58), his enemies should suffer YHWH's angry persecution and destruction of their lives on earth (v. 66).

98. On raised hands as a gesture of prayer, see, for example, Keel (1997, pp. 313, 322), Staubli and Schroer (2014, p. 230), Weippert and Weippert (2013, p. 438) and Lamentations 2:18–19: 'Their heart cried out to the Lord. O wall of dear Zion, bring down tears like a wadi, day and night. Do not give yourself respite, do not let the pupil of your eye be still. Get up, cry aloud in the night, at the beginning of watches. Pour your heart out like water in front of the Lord's face. Lift up your palms to him for the sake of the lives of your small children, who languished from hunger at the head of every street'.

99. Whereas some scholars want to hear a protest and accusation against YHWH in Lamentations 3:42–47 (e.g. Boase 2006, pp. 228–229, 231; Rom-Shiloni 2021, pp. 434–439), I read these verses as a description of the situation that caused the speaker to summon the people to repentance in Verses 40–41. They have been disloyal and rebellious, but YHWH, the heavenly sovereign, did not pardon their behaviour. The speaker portrays YHWH as a king who mercilessly quelled the rebellion of unfaithful subjects by killing and displacing them. Assyrian kings, for example, present themselves as doing the same things to recalcitrant vassals in their inscriptions and material images (Kotzé 2020c, pp. 622–623). By quashing rebellions, the Assyrian kings reinstate order where the rebels created chaos. In order to restore how things are supposed to be, the kings first eliminate the disorder by rooting out and relocating the rebels (Liverani 2017, p. 540). Similarly, YHWH punished the people's disloyalty and rebellion by destroying the culprits and disposing of them among the nations. Human enemies also threatened the lives of the people as part of the divine punishment. On the one hand, YHWH, cloaked in anger, pursued the rebels. On the other hand, the divine king in Heaven was wrapped in a cloud and unavailable to be placated and appeased (for images of deities hidden by cloud cover in Mesopotamian laments, see Gabbay 2014, p. 30). When YHWH punished the people, God rid Godself of the rebels and did not seek rapprochement with them. Even so, tactics such as pleas for mercy, tears and mourning may move kings to make an end to the punitive measures they employ to suppress rebellions (the tactics are common motifs in visual representations of royal attacks on rebellious cities; see e.g. Keel 1997, pp. 102, 148, 352, Figures 132, 132a, 199, 477; Kotzé 2021c, pp. 386–387, no. 33; Staubli & Schroer 2014, pp. 185, 233, Figures 28b, 36b; Winter 1983, p. 21, Figures 6, 9, 10). In Lamentations 3:48–51, the speaker presents himself engaged in this strategy. The end of the punishment signals that things can go back to the way they are supposed to be and the repentance of the rebels, their return to the king (vv. 40–41), forms part of the restored order.

they have strayed onto the wrong track, to hit the road back to YHWH. This implies that they have thought about where they went wrong, that they are contrite, and that they want things to be set right. The speaker directs them to say all of this in prayer to YHWH.¹⁰⁰

■ Features of the poems of Lamentations that influence the wordings of the prayer passages and the perspectives they present

The brief comments on selected passages show that several features of the poems influence the wordings of the characters' prayers and the perspectives they present. It goes without saying that these features are important to consider when modern readers interpret the poems' prayer passages.

The first feature, exemplified by Lamentations 1, for instance, is the multiple voices that are heard in the prayer passages. It is not just one character who prays in the poems; several different characters turn to YHWH in prayer, and all of them do not voice the same concerns. Some characters pray for mercy, others for justice or restoration. None of the prayers, however, necessarily puts the perspectives the poems promote into words.

The next noteworthy feature is the different versions of the poems and their prayer passages. No single text captures the definitive wording of the prayers, and the various versions indicate how scribes in antiquity adapted the formulations and content of the poems. They also reveal how meanings of the same words and phrases developed over time or were interpreted in more than one way.

The different versions of the poems indicate that they were repeatedly copied in their language of composition and translations. The transmission history points to the third feature of the poems, their intentional preservation in writing. This feature, in turn, implies that the poems reached audiences at more than one time and place. We do not know the identity or circumstances of these audiences, but we may assume that they would have been able to make sense of the images and ideas of the poems and their prayer passages.

The assumption that audiences were able to understand the images and ideas of Lamentations over long periods of time rests on the fact that the

100. The heart is the seat of thinking, feelings, and the will (Janowski 2019, p. 148). The image of raising the heart on the palm of the hands pictures people giving their inner selves as a prayer offering to God.

content of the poems and their prayer passages was firmly rooted in the larger intellectual environment of the ancient Near East. This rootedness of the poems' content in the conceptual context of the ancient Near East is the fourth feature that influences the wordings and perspectives of the prayer passages of Lamentations. It is reflected by the resemblances between the images and ideas of the poems and those of other ancient Near Eastern texts and material images. Indeed, as products of their intellectual environment, it is not surprising that the images and ideas of the poems of Lamentations have counterparts in cultural products from all over the ancient Near East, as the comments on the wordings and content of prayer passages in Lamentations 1 and 3 illustrate.

■ Conclusion

The aforementioned features of the poems are also relevant to research on the theological contributions of the prayer passages in Lamentations. I mention, by way of conclusion, some areas where the features of the poems can be explored to potentially advance our knowledge of the prayer passages' God-talk.

Scholars have given a hearing to the multiple voices in the poems, which express the viewpoints of a variety of characters.¹⁰¹ The characters who pray do so in the face of disasters, whether they ultimately blame themselves for what has happened, hold human antagonists partly or wholly responsible for their distress, see the hand of YHWH in the events that transpired, or attribute the times of trouble to a combination of causes. The multiple voices in the poems are undoubtedly important for an understanding of their theological discourses. But research on the multiple voices and perspectives of the poems has largely been limited to a single version of the poems in one language. This research must be extended beyond the Hebrew version of the poems represented by the MT and include the versions preserved by the Qumran manuscripts of Lamentations and the ancient translations as well. What is more, the theological contributions of the prayer passages of Lamentations do not lie only in what the characters in the different versions of the poems say but also in what the poems leave unsaid. I have in mind especially the conceptions of the deity that the prayers do not spell out and the unspoken implications of the transmission of the poems.

The prayer passages use figurative language to speak about God (e.g. the portrayals of YHWH in the roles of a king), and these divine images point to conceptions of the deity that circulated and made sense within the

101. See, for example, Bier (2015) and her discussion of other studies.

larger cultural and intellectual environments of the various versions of the poems. Studies that bring these conceptions of YHWH and their associated ideas into clearer focus¹⁰² may help to heighten our appreciation for what the prayer passages of Lamentations bring to the theological table talk.

The comments on Lamentations 5 above suggest that audiences were encouraged to draw theological implications from its content based on the fact that the poem continued to be preserved in writing. Future studies can work out this idea in greater detail and apply it to the other poems of Lamentations.

Finally, given the repeated transmission of Lamentations in antiquity, the preservation of more than one version of the poems, and the assumption that the poems reached audiences at different times and places, it will not do for us to look for the contributions of the poems' prayer passages only in the theological discourses of a specific context. For example, it is widely assumed that the poems of Lamentations were born out of the disastrous circumstances of the 6th-century BCE when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and exiled some of the people of the kingdom of Judah. Be that as it may, there is no reason to also assume that the poems and their prayer passages spoke out of one mouth to a single audience from the beginning. Situating the poems and prayers in the 6th-century BCE also does not mean that their theological insights should be tied to specific strands of thinking of those times. Take the Septuagint (LXX) version, for example. LXX Lamentations puts the poems in the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah without sacrificing the intelligibility and importance of their ideas for audiences of the Greek translation.¹⁰³ In other words, we will do well not to pigeonhole the theological discourses of the extant versions of the poems of Lamentations and their prayer passages (especially by using modern categories such as Deuteronomic theology, Zion theology, theodicy, antitheodicy or the like) and not to restrict the theological contributions of the artefacts to a particular historical scenario.

102. One way to achieve this goal is through comparative studies that examine the similarities and differences between ideas and images of the poems of Lamentations and their counterparts in other ancient Near Eastern cultural products.

103. See the sentence at the beginning of the Greek translation that functions as the introduction to this version of Lamentations: 'And it happened, after Israel was taken captive and Jerusalem was laid waste, Jeremiah sat weeping and uttered this lament over Jerusalem and said'. On Jeremiah as the speaker of the poems of LXX Lamentations, see Labahn (2021, pp. 219–241). In a helpful discussion of the reasons why rabbinic sources also attribute Lamentations to Jeremiah, Kalman (2019, p. 37) notes that it cannot be conclusively determined whether the early rabbis were aware of the connection LXX Lamentations makes between the book and the prophet. It is worth mentioning in this regard that scholars have questioned the view of Barthélemy (1963, p. 80) and others that the *kaige* group of translations and revisions LXX Lamentations supposedly belongs to was produced under the auspices of the 1st-century Palestinian rabbinate and reflects the interests of rabbinic interpretation of biblical texts.

Prayer in Daniel

Marius Nel

Research Focus: Ecumenism: Pentecostalism and Neo-Pentecostalism,
Unit for Reformational Theology and the Development of the South African Society,
Faculty of Theology, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa

■ Introduction¹⁰⁴

Scholars gave much attention to the date of composition of the book of Daniel, the enigmatic bilingual state of the text, the search for the most likely sources and the different style of the two halves. However, in the process, a thorough theological investigation of the text has suffered.

Most scholars accept that the book contains apocalyptic literature and that it suggests a close relationship with cultic themes related to the temple as the dwelling place of YHWH on Mount Zion (Ex 15:17; 25:8; 29:45–46), representing the reign of God (Ps 96:6, 9–10). In this chapter, the focus is on the book of Daniel's utilisation of prayer as one of the prominent cultic motifs that play a prominent role in the construction of both halves of the book. The term 'motif' is employed to refer to linguistic, literary or conceptual elements within a literary unit, while 'cult' suggests the fixed conventions of worship observed by individuals and the group for the sake of realising divine favour in everyday life (Vogel 2010, pp. 5–6). After the destruction of the temple in

104. The author expresses his thanks and gratitude to the National Research Foundation (NRF) of the Republic of South Africa for providing their generous research funding for this study. Note to the reader: The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the NRF.

How to cite: Nel, M 2023, 'Prayer in Daniel', in AJ Coetsee & FP Viljoen (eds.), *Biblical Theology of prayer in the Old Testament*, Reformed Theology in Africa Series, vol. 12, AOSIS Books, Cape Town, pp. 159–173. <https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2023.BK417.10>

Jerusalem in 586 BCE when King Jehoiakim refused to pay tribute in Nebuchadnezzar's fourth year and the resulting Judean exile (586–538 BCE), exiles had to redefine their cult; notions of worship now had to include several acts that replaced and substituted the temple cult, such as individual and collective prayer. The Babylonian exile challenged Judeans to search for new perspectives on how to name, understand and live through the catastrophe that threatened their very survival. In the words of O'Connor (2011, p. 128), they were forced to become 'analysts of a world ground to bits by the disaster'.¹⁰⁵ The Antiochean crisis (167–164 BCE) amplified the Danielic exilic narratives when Jewish people were again alienated from the temple during Antiochus IV Epiphanes's defilement of the temple, when he erected an altar to Zeus Olympios and ordered that sacrifices be made at the feet of an idol in the image of the king.

The research follows several methodological steps, including a close reading of the biblical text and its language conventions by employing linguistic and literary tools. A close reading implies that one reads carefully to determine what the text says in order to make logical inferences from it by analysing how and why individuals, events and ideas develop and interact with each other. One also interprets words and phrases in terms of their different meanings, such as connotative or figurative, and analyses the structure of the text and how the different parts relate to each other and the whole. The last task is to assess how a point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text (Wiggins 2015). Simultaneously, attention is given to the cult as redefined in terms of space and time and consideration of references within the book to cultic texts in other canonical books. A consideration of prayer as a theological theme in the book concludes the discussion.

■ Cultic motifs of the book of Daniel

Cultic motifs play an essential role in the book of Daniel. Its narrator deliberately places the narratives within a cultic perspective, illustrated by the reference to the temple vessels in Chapters 1 and 5, the decision of the four young Hebrews not to defile them with the king's food and wine in Chapter 1,¹⁰⁶ the references to the offering and incense presented to Daniel

105. A significant part of the Hebrew Bible was formed as a response of faith and a means to redefine the cult to the deep historical trauma that the Babylonian exile posed to Judeans. They (or their priests and political leaders) responded to the trauma, pain and catastrophe by providing answers or means by which to find new ways to express their religious tradition, make ethical decisions and find a new way of understanding the divine way (Carr 2015).

106. The tales suggest the most sumptuous and exotic circumstances imaginable for Jewish people in the court of the Babylonian and Persian rulers, with its exotic enticements that include political influence and wealth. The minority existence of some Jewish people amidst such riches forms the core of the tales,

in Chapter 2, the prayer in Daniel 6 toward Jerusalem, the sacrificial animals and cleansing of the temple in Chapter 8, the prophecy at the time of the evening offering of a Messiah and the anointing of the Most Holy in Chapter 9 and the three mourning weeks in Chapter 10. The term 'holy' is employed more than 30 times to qualify God, divine messengers, Jerusalem, the sanctuary, Israel, the prince and the covenant (Miller 1994, p. 154). Jerusalem, the holy mountain and the sanctuary are connected, according to Daniel 9:16-17, 26, as the place of God's residence, representing a cultic theology of divine presence, evidenced by many other texts in the Old Testament (OT) (Ps 74:2; Is 24:23; 27:13; 56:7; 66:20).

Other cultic themes that develop within the book include the deportation of the temple vessels by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in Chapter 1 and the abuse of these items in Chapter 6 by King Belshazzar, the Chaldean king. The vessels served as a significant symbol for Judah's cultic relationship with YHWH and the redefinition required by God's people in exile of the relationship. The term 'cultic' is employed to refer to all fixed conventions of worship that believers observe by which the benefits of divine favour in everyday life could be realised (Vogel 1996, p. 22). In ancient Israel, worship was mainly confined to the tabernacle and temple, but in exilic times more general notions of worship were emphasised, like prayer. Penitential prayers developed and articulated a view of the people of God in five key theological themes, according to Boda (1999, pp. 25-27). They are the remnant, people defined in terms of the land they had lost, people of the covenant and the law, defined over against the nations and by their unique relationship to God.

By beginning and ending the first half of the book of Daniel in this way, the narrator demonstrates the significant role of the temple cult in the narrative and interprets the events surrounding Judah's exile from the perspective of priests and the cult, leading Lebram (1970, p. 515) to conclude that the cult plays a decisive role in the narrator's theological endeavours. Other related cultic themes are Daniel's prayer in the direction of Jerusalem in Daniel 9:16 which suggests that Daniel directs his prayer towards Heaven, where he knew that God was residing, although he does so within its connection to the holy mountain (Vogel 1996, p. 25); the stone in Chapter 2 and a son of a man in Chapter 7; and the prayers found in Chapters 3 and 9. Doukhan (1987, pp. 26-29) links the two animals in Chapter 8 to the cult and LaCocque (1976, pp. 119-142) links Daniel's prayer in Chapter 9 to the liturgy of the purification and burnt offerings of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16:5-6 and Leviticus 25:9, and the year of the yobel, demonstrating its link to the Israelite cult.

106. (cont.)

explained in terms of its threats of death by way of dismemberment, burning in furnaces and mauling by wild animals (Smith-Christopher 2001, p. 267).

The references to 'a man clothed in linen' in Daniel 10:5 and 12:6-7 may refer to the white garment that reflects the high priest's clothing on the Day of Atonement (Lv 16:4, 23; see also Ez 9:2-3). The term 'the holy covenant' found in Daniel 11:28, 30 is also a cultic term that may refer to 'the covenant concerning the sanctuary', according to Van der Kooij (1993, p. 497). Because cult played a prominent role in Israelites' faith and daily lives, the theme also elucidates the concept that one finds in the book of Daniel (Vogel 1996, p. 37).

■ Prayer as an element in the cultic motif of the book of Daniel

It is necessary to discount Daniel's theological investigations as a part of apocalyptic literature and the cultic motifs that serve as a determinative factor in the book to do justice to an investigation into the role occupied by prayer in the book. Scholarly consensus agrees that the book of Daniel is a part of the genre of apocalyptic literature, with its descriptions of human history in terms of divine control and angels and demons that determine historical events, the time of the end, the messianic kingdom, a son of man and life after death, a novel idea in OT theological endeavours (Russell 1964, pp. 6-7). The question remains to what extent 'apocalyptic' and 'cult' have to do with each other; research illustrated that they belong together in Jewish intertestamental literature (Gillingham 1996, pp. 147-169).

The temporal and spatial axis also characterise the apocalyptic genre and the cult (Collins 1979, p. 9). The narratives frequently mention prayer within the cultic context of the sacred space of the sanctuary, the mountain and the city. They also mention prayer in the cultic context of sacred time found in the ten days of non-defilement in Chapter 1, the prayer three times daily in Chapter 6, reference to the time of the evening offering in Chapter 9, periods of seven in Chapters 4 and 9 and three weeks of mourning in Chapter 10.¹⁰⁷

107. References to prayer are in Daniel 2:17-23 with Daniel's request to his friends to join him in prayer to implore the God of heaven for help to reveal the mystery of the meaning of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream and the prayer in which he blesses the God of heaven for the answer to the meaning of the dream; Daniel 2:46, where King Nebuchadnezzar prostrates himself and worships Daniel and offers to him; Daniel 3:4-6, where King Nebuchadnezzar orders that all should fall down and worship the golden statue the king has set up; Daniel 3:8-12, with the Chaldeans charging the three friends with disobedience when they refused to bow down and worship the statue; Daniel 3:28, where the king demands that Jewish people's God should be blessed; Daniel 4:34-36, where King Nebuchadnezzar blesses the Most High because God has given his reason back; the judgment in Daniel 5:23 because King Belshazzar exalted himself against the Lord of heaven and did not honour God; Daniel 6:8, with officials convincing King Darius to decree that no one may pray to anyone for 30 days except to the king; Daniel 6:10 that describes Daniel getting down on his knees three times a day to pray to his God and praise God; Daniel 6:11, with the conspirators seeing Daniel praying and 6:13 with their charge before the king; Daniel 6:26, with the king's decree that all citizens must fear the God of Daniel; Daniel 9:4-19, with its prayer of penitence concerning Jeremiah's prophecy; Daniel 10:2-3 that describes Daniel mourning and fasting for three weeks; Daniel 10:12, with the assurance of an angel that Daniel's prayer was heard; and Daniel 11:31 that

■ Redefining the cult

In reconsidering the role that prayer plays in Daniel, one should discount the exilic Judeans' redefinition of the temple cult necessitated by the destruction of the temple by Babylonian forces in terms of privatised worship practices. Previously, the temple, especially the altar with its daily sacrifices, served as a focal point for Israelite spirituality and a precondition for atonement and forgiveness of sins. The destroyed temple still served as an anchor point for the exiled Judeans living in Babylon (Vogel 2010, pp. 45–46), exemplified in Daniel, who directed his prayers in that direction (Dn 6).¹⁰⁸ Jerusalem, with its temple, forms the central spatial axis or *Trägerkreise* of the narrative. The present state in which the city found itself was interpreted as a confirmation of God's anger against Israel (Werline 2004). However, the apocalyptic schema used guarantees the end of that period; in opposition to the militant Maccabees and in contrast to the apocalyptic Enochic traditions, the Daniel narrator places no trust in human beings to bring about an end to the desolation of the temple and people. Instead, the narrator chooses a non-resistant reaction to the events, with God as the exclusive agent of change (Venter 1996, p. 625). This perspective represents an 'apocalyptic modification of asceticism with its Deuteronomic based penitential prayer placed in juxtaposition with apocalyptic theology' (Venter 2004, p. 617). The narrator re-adjusts traditional Torah categories to make the Zadokite tradition viable for a new crisis situation.

During the Exile, the temple on the holy mountain formed the cult's main spatial axis and served as a reference for the heavenly Zion (Doukhan 1987, p. 92). Traditionally, YHWH had acted from the sanctuary; now, the Jewish people directed their petitions to the heavenly Zion, the cultic centre of YHWH's abode (Vogel 2010, p. 46). As God's city, Jerusalem had served as a counterpart to Babylon (Dn 9:18–19); now, Jewish people, in mockery, compared their theocratic centre in YHWH's presence to Babylon's idols. Israelite religion was continued and preserved by the narrator in depicting YHWH as the only true God who deserved to be worshipped, the one who rules on the heavenly sacred mountain as controller of history. In this way, the narrator serves one of the book's central concerns: Judah's restoration and a radical change in their fate (Vogel 2010, p. 65). It functions

107. (cont.)

describes a king whose forces occupy and profane the temple, abolish the regular burnt offering, and set up an abomination in the temple. It is clear that most references are found in the narratives.

108. It should be kept in mind that the Babylonian's goal regarding the exile and deportation was intentionally to punish people groups for their disloyalty, resistance and rebellion. Another goal was to eliminate rivals to power, the creation of a population dependent on the central administration by placing them in unknown settings, the development of economic monopolies and the restoration of empty or under-utilised lands, as Thompson (1994, p. 342) explains.

against the background of Jewish people's status as a minority occupying a liminal state where they can exercise cultural criticism from a place outside the mainstream. A deliberate, provocative aesthetic challenge to the prevailing social order and identity can be found in deliberate and intentional nonconformity as cultural or spiritual resistance (Smith-Christopher 2001, p. 268).

The cultic time of daily sacrifices, such as the evening offering, and sacred feasts, such as the Day of Atonement, form the temporal axis. References to the ten days of non-defilement in Daniel 1:8-20, the prayer towards Jerusalem three times a day in Daniel 6:11, the 70 years in Daniel 9:2 and 24 and the three weeks of mourning in Daniel 10:2-4 play into the temporal axis of the cultic motif. That Daniel customarily prays three times a day towards Jerusalem (Dn 6:10-11) does not represent only an individual religious activity but serves as an apparent reference to the temple service, according to Vogel (1996, p. 26). He suggests that Daniel prays to the destroyed temple site at the time of the daily sacrifices (Ex 29:39; 1 Chr 23:30; Qumran documents describe a ternary prayer each day; see also Ps 55:17).

In conclusion, by considering the narratives' temporal and spatial axes, it becomes possible to demonstrate the significant impact that newly developed cultic motifs play in the theology of the book of Daniel to redefine the cult. Venter (2000, p. 673) finds no less than 140 temporal references in the book for different aspects of time. The book is concerned with history with the purpose of depicting the future by looking into the back mirror to describe the future, illustrating its preoccupation with time. The designation of YHWH as the 'Ancient of days', used in Daniel 7:9, 13, 22 exclusively confirms this observation. Even the exact dating found in the book illustrates, at times, the cultic motif. For instance, the narrator uses the reference in Chapter 10 to the third year of Cyrus, king of Persia (v. 1), during the first month and 24th day (v. 4). The date refers to either the third day of Nisan in the Jewish calendar, which was the date of the Passover that commemorated the exodus from Egypt, or of Tishri, when the Day of Atonement highlighted the high priest's plea that YHWH would cleanse Israel from its sins. The Jubilee that began on that day would connect the narrative to the 'seventy weeks' discussed in Chapter 9. In both cases, the narrator provides a reasonable explanation for Daniel's mourning act for an extended period, correlating with the 21 days of angelic war (Vogel 2010, p. 157; *contra* Collins 1993, p. 373, who argues that the specificity of the date is simply a device to make the narrative more vivid).

■ Dissonance and function of the prayer of penitence in Daniel 9

What is the function of the prayer of penitence in Daniel 9? Why does the narrator employ the prayer within the narrative of the chapter? It is important to note that it seems that the prayer is secondary. The prayer does not show any knowledge about Jeremiah's prophecy or Gabriel's response to Daniel's prayer, and it does not suggest that the end of Jerusalem's desolation is on its way. The prayer does not secure divine forgiveness and does not even mention it. It does offer rhetorical persuasion for believing that God will answer because of God's virtues of faithfulness and compassion, demonstrated in God's historical behaviour toward Israel. While Verses 1-2 and 20-27 are concerned with the meaning of Jeremiah's prophecy of 70 years as the time allotted by God for the desolation of Jerusalem, the thematic unity of the prophecy is ignored in the prayer itself, interrupting the logical narrative sequence. Simultaneously, the prayer's emphasis on confession and repentance does not fit well with the context sketched in Verses 2-3 and 21-27. Instead of a prayer for illumination about the meaning of Jeremiah's prophecy, as one would expect, the prayer is concerned with other, unrelated themes. The narrative also contains duplications in Verses 3, 4a and 20-21 that betray the editor's attempt to integrate the prayer in a context where it does not fit well. The language of the prayer is also different from the rest of the narrative in Daniel 9, without any signs that it was translated from Aramaic.

That does not imply that the prayer does not contribute to the narrative. Its contribution is foreseeing the eventual ultimate restoration of Jerusalem and the temple, based on the observation that יְהוָה is a great and awesome God that keeps to the covenant with loyalty. The implication is clear: that יְהוָה would maintain the covenant, not because Daniel prays in the prayer of penitence for forgiveness and grace but for God's 'own sake'. The prayer is utilised as a literary vehicle for proclaiming God's self-vindication (Balentine 1993, p. 108), linking it to the *Gattung* of doxology. Jerusalem's restoration is in good hands because of God's loyal love.

The most distinctive stylistic feature of all prayers in the book of Daniel is their rhetorical preoccupation with God; they serve as proclamations of the greatness of the power of God and God's love and care for Israel, contrasted with the nation's rebellious disobedience to God's 'truth' ('God has confirmed his words' in Dn 9:12; 'the LORD our God is right in all that he has done' in Dn 9:13). The theological *Tendenz* emphasises that God is omnipotent, in contrast to humanity's weakness in trusting God and their dependence on God's grace (Balentine 1993, p. 90). For instance, Daniel's prayer in Chapter 2 explains God's omnipotence in terms of God's ability to change times and seasons and depose and set up kings. Human weakness

is emphasised when Daniel ascribes human wisdom and knowledge to God, who reveals mysteries existing in the darkness (Dn 2:21).

When the prayer is left out, the narrative suggests that Daniel turns to prayer and fasting in order to perceive the meaning of Jeremiah's 70-years prophecy and that his prayer is not recorded. The next event is when Gabriel reveals a reinterpretation of Jeremiah's prophecy, changing the 'seventy years' into 'seventy weeks of years' (v. 24), which refers to 490 years and places the book squarely in the challenging times of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 BCE) and the suppression of the Jerusalem temple cult. The narrator uses Jeremiah's ideas on the Exile's duration as part of an apocalypse (Venter 2005, p. 407). The focus has changed now to Antiochus's desecration of the temple (Dn 9:26; 1 Mc 1:29-35; 2 Mc 5:22-26), which eventually led to the reconsecration of the temple by Judas Maccabees. The concern is with the question of the persecutions and oppressions that threatened faithful Jewish believers and when the end would be to the closure of the temple and cult. The Babylonian disaster's traditions have become sources of material that the narrator utilises to reconstruct stories about existence in the Seleucid conquest, providing effective stereotypical language and folklore patterns (Smith-Christopher 2001, p. 276). The last 'seven years' correspond with the time of Antiochus' persecution and oppression (vv. 26-27). The purpose of Gabriel's reinterpretation of Jeremiah's prophecy is to assure and encourage listeners that the threat will pass away in time and the end of believers' suffering is near. Simultaneously, the interpretation of the 'weeks of years' emphasises that the allotted time must run its entire course because God has determined it to be so.

When one reinserts the prayer of Verses 4-19 into the narrative, the lines of thought move. One finds in the prayer a concern about the duration of Jerusalem's oppression, followed by a prayer of forgiveness that focuses on God's grace that is contrasted to Israel's disobedience and sin. Lastly, the prayer returns to Jerusalem's plight with a plea that it would end soon. The prayer is analysed in the next section.

■ **Ascription, confession and petition in Daniel 9**

According to Towner (1971, p. 210), prose prayers of penitence share a similar structure, based on the contents of Deuteronomy 4 and 30, of ascription followed by confession and petition. These elements changed according to changing historical language and religious needs (Venter 2005, p. 406). In Daniel 9, Verse 4 forms the ascription, Verses 5-14 the confession and Verses 15-19 the petition. However, as a dynamic of

remembrance characterises Israel and God's history, the changes in the prayer's internal logic and the formal elements are not delineated as one would suspect. Verse 4 starts with the ascription to יְיָ as Israel's great and awesome God who remained faithful to the obedient, leading to the confession in the following verses that emphasises that Israel had sinned and not listened to the prophets. The following two verses (vv. 7–8) again contrast יְיָ's righteousness and Israel's 'open' shame ('blushed red in the face because of shame') because of their treachery.¹⁰⁹ It happens again in Verses 9–10, with Verse 9 addressing יְיָ, the God of compassion and forgiveness, contrasted to Verse 10 that refers to Israel's rebellion, disobedience, and transgression in reaction to God's love.

The pattern is disrupted in Verses 12–14, which describe the curse and oath as God's judgement. Again and unexpectedly, the contrast that is so prominent in the preceding verses again surfaces, as though the supplicant cannot describe God's judgement objectively as Israel's deserved punishment without interrupting the train of thought and coming back to the remembrance of God's grace in the past. However, the narrator this time converts the order to allow a final emphasis on Israel's sin (v. 13b: we did not appease God by leaving our sins behind; v. 14b: but God is righteousness – v. 14c: we did not listen to God but were disobedient to God's voice).

The contrast marks the narrator's petition for forgiveness and restitution between Israel's behaviour and God's faithfulness, in contrast to God's justice. It is important to note that the prayer begins and ends with words to God (ascription), serving as the frame for the prayer and indicating that the references to God's faithfulness carry more weight than Israel's sin (Venter 2005, p. 413). The extensive elaboration of YHWH's mercy and forgiveness also serves to amplify Israel's sins. One can only understand what Israel's guilt consists of by comparing and contrasting it to the 'great and awesome God' who is a 'keeper of covenant and steadfast love', the one who is compassionate and forgiving but also acts in righteousness (Goldingay 1989, pp. 241–244). When the justice of God's actions is repeatedly stressed (Dn 9:7, 14), rendering any response other than contrition is entirely inappropriate (Balentine 1993, p. 117), reminding of the laments found in the Psalms with their emphasis on the justice of God. The difference between a prayer of contrition and a lament is the absence of

109. The term used to qualify the people's shame, 'open', comes from the same word that translates as 'face'. The term refers to the front part of a person's head, where the eyes, nose and mouth are (Gn 43:31). Seeing someone's face could represent the person's physical presence, including the whole body (Gn 44:14; 47:10). The term 'face' is used also to metaphorically describe several emotional states. For instance, it can be states that 'shame covers someone's face'. Here it can be dynamically translated as 'to be red in the face due to blushing for shame'.

any protestations of innocence or questioning of God's intentions in the penitence. Instead, the narrator emphasises the confession of sins that highlights the sins by contrasting it to the good deeds that God showed toward the sinners in the past. The polarity of Israel's transgression *vis-à-vis* God's righteousness is a theological tool that the narrator uses to conceptualise who Israel is in terms of their God (Venter 2005, p. 414).

That one finds the element of confession in Verse 5 with five different words that describe Israel's condition also illustrates the severity with which Daniel considers Israel's sins. The terms can be translated as 'we have sinned', perverseness or 'we have done wrong', wickedness or 'we have acted wickedly', 'we have rebelled' and 'we have turned aside from your commandments and ordinances'. Two general confessions summarise these expressions that the narrator repeats thrice throughout the unit: 'we have sinned' (vv. 5, 8, 11) and 'we have not listened' (vv. 6, 10, 14). Werline's (2004, p. 3) definition of the *Gattung* of penitential prayer underlines the polarity between sin and God's justice. He defines it as a direct address to God in which an individual as such or an individual on behalf of a group confesses sins and petitions for forgiveness as an act of repentance, based on God's historical acts of redemption. It places YHWH's righteousness in juxtaposition to Israel's unrighteousness. For that reason, sovereignty demonstrated in power, mercy, faithfulness, and righteousness are from the pray-ers' perspective, with the petitions raised to change the people's present circumstances. Much was at stake for the pray-ers in God's response; some consequences when their petitions were not answered would have been severe and even destructive for Judah's future. On the one hand, they would not find relief in the crisis that threatens their identity and survival, but on the other hand, their trust in the God of their fathers might be seriously jeopardised (Balentine 1993, p. 117).

The petition is found in Verses 15–19, according to Towner (1971, p. 211). In this rhetorical unit, one finds two requests for divine intervention, each introduced by 'and now' (vv. 15, 17). Verses 15–16's first petition calls on God to turn away from divine anger and wrath as manifested against Jerusalem. Jerusalem serves as a symbol of Judah's predicament of exile, which comprises the loss of their land, monarchy and political independence, religion and identity. The Daniel narratives represent Jewish people renegotiating their religious and cultural identities in response to the loss of their land and temple and new cross-cultural contact within a context of unequal distribution of power and authority (Smith-Christopher 2001, p. 266), as discussed. Again, as in the previous elements of the prayer, the plea is framed and supported by a double reference to the contrast already developed between God's character of grace and Israel's failure and sin; themes that determined the way the narrator also framed the prayer in the first rhetorical unit. The narrator portrays God as the deliverer from Egypt, the driving force behind the liberation and

exodus (v. 15a), and a God whose actions towards Israel were always characterised by righteousness (הַיְשֻׁרִים; v. 16a).

On the contrary, Israel sinned against God. The author utilises three words in four ways to refer to sin in Verses 15–16 ('we have sinned', 'we have done wickedly', 'our sins' and 'iniquities of our ancestors', in contrast to v. 5 with its five terms). Israel has become a reproach for all other people. In the second petition (vv. 17–19), the narrator asks God to turn toward the people (*contra* v. 16 with its 'turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy mountain') and respond to their cry for help in need. The plea is carried rhetorically by 'hear' [שְׁמַע], used three times and with each request supplemented by additional language that eventually builds toward a climactic final petition that God would forgive the people: 'hear, and let your face shine'; 'hear, and open your eyes'; 'hear, and forgive and act' (Balentine 1993, p. 106).

Intentionally, the prayer invokes God's name seven times in the four verses, concluded in the last three petitions, each starting with the vocative אֱלֹהֵינוּ, making this the *Kyrie Eleison* of the Hebrew Bible (in Montgomery's 1927, p. 368 words). One finds the phrase 'for your own sake' two times in Verses 17 and 19, and Verse 18 explains what the narrator implies by the words: 'for not according to our own righteousness are we presenting our supplication before you, but according to your great compassion'. In this way, the prayer concludes as it begins, in praise of God's compassion, faithfulness, love, and grace but also righteousness. The prayer for forgiveness and rescue from the exilic situation functions against the background of Israel's memories of God's history of mercy and compassion with their nation.

■ Prayer as worship

When the book's narrator refers to prayer, the concern is with the question of whom one worships. Their surrounding world challenged the exiles with the Babylonian gods' might that seemingly had conquered the exiles' God. The narratives want to prove that Israel's God is the mightiest and that YHWH alone should be worshipped. The different prayers have some mutual concepts of God: God is righteous (Dn 9:7, 14), listens to prayers (Dn 9:17–19), carries out the warnings the LORD gave (Dn 9:12, 14), makes a name for Godself (Dn 9:17, 19) and acts on behalf of God's name (Dn 9:19). God is also the great and awesome God (Dn 9:4) and merciful (Dn 9:18) (Venter 2005, p. 416).

The exiles lamented the temple's loss and the monarchy, independence and a country and capital of their own. Gradually, they began to worship the LORD without the cultic rituals of sacrifices and feasts that had marked

the temple calendar. It was only probable that they still remembered the cult and reoriented their new worship services in terms of the sacred space and sacred time that had characterised temple worship practices. The narratives set Daniel's friends in Chapter 3 as the standard for authentic worship when they remain standing while everybody else bowed down to the king's image with the herald's proclamation to fall down and worship King Nebuchadnezzar's golden statue when they heard the sound of the music. They enter the fiery furnace rather than show allegiance to the king. According to Chapter 6, Daniel prays daily at set times reminiscent of times of cultic observance towards Jerusalem, and in Chapter 10 he fasts during times of cultic observances. The prayers' concern with Jerusalem illustrates the influence of older sacred patterns on the exiles' new practices.

The narrator expresses the attitude of Daniel's mourning and fasting described in Chapter 10 by the term *עָנָה* (Dn 10:12), a term that Jewish people reserved for references to the Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement (Lv 16:29, 31; 23:27, 29, 32), according to Vogel (1996, p. 31). It depicts the self-affliction and humbling attitude required of the individual who participates in the day's ritual. The term suggests that Daniel involves himself with a cultic activity and not only a personal religious ritual. *עָנָה* suggests a reflexive activity to humble oneself or to afflict one's soul, and according to Leviticus 16:31; 23:27, 32 and Numbers 29:7, it is associated with fasting (Ps 35:13; Is 58:3, 5). Psalms 109:16, 22; 147:3 use the *root* *עָנָה* with the expression 'the brokenhearted', suggesting the spiritual overtone of the cultic activity involved. As explained, Daniel's three weeks' fast and penitence (Dn 10:2) in the first month may connect it to the month of the fall festivals, which included Yom Kippur (Vogel 1996, p. 32).

That the book is concerned with the struggle in Judeans' minds between two cultic systems is clear from the very first verse, the reference to Judah or Jerusalem and Babylon that marks the book's theology as a counterpart ideology (Sheriffs 1988, p. 42). The symbol identified by the narrator for Zionism is the holy mountain (mentioned five times in Dn 2:35, 45; 9:16, 20; 11:45), Jerusalem (Dn 9:16; Vogel 1996, p. 24), the sanctuary (Dn 8; 9), and temple articles (Dn 1; 5) in direct apposition to Babylon with its images (Dn 3) and idols (Dn 5).

Sheriffs (1988, pp. 20–27) defines Neo-Babylonians' theological philosophy at the hand of a barrel cylinder of Nabopolassar dating from the end of the 7th-century BCE. The text relates that Marduk built Babylon at the time when he ordered the establishment of the cosmos and created human beings as part of a 'holy city'. The gods also lived in the city located as the cosmic centre between the heavens and the underworld. That Babylon would rule the entire creation was ordained as a manifestation of the kingship of Marduk, who elected the king, changing him into a godlike being. In the light of these ideological overtones, it becomes clear why the

narrator emphasises the LORD as the only creator and king worthy of allegiance and worship. Vogel (2010, pp. 223–224) concludes that cultic allegiance is the pervading theological theme of the book; the central theme of cultic allegiance is its theology of worship that evolves in the context of the battle between different cultic systems. That not even the Babylonian king can escape the all-pervading might of YHWH is demonstrated by Daniel 1:2, when the LORD gave Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, into the hand of the Babylonian king. Daniel 1:2 also mentions, however, that King Nebuchadnezzar carries some of the articles of the house of God into the land of Shinar (an ancient name for Babylon, referring to Gn 11:2 and its narrative about the tower of Babel) to his god's treasure house. Although this represents a common practice and standard procedure when a rebellious nation is subjected, in the book of Daniel, the reference at the beginning of the book serves as a key to everything that follows, dealing with the issues of superiority and defeat, usurpation and worship (Vogel 1996, p. 27). It also determines the events described in Daniel 5.

An integral cultic practice is penitence. Judah's exile in Babylon serves as an explanation for the emphasis in the book of Daniel on prayers of penitence (Dn 9:4–19). Related to the biblical genre of lament, prayers of penitence (also found in Ezr 9:6–15; Neh 1:5–11; 9:6–37) show a different form and content. Such prayers are characterised by the keyword 'to make a confession', the *hithpael* form of the verb הִתְפַּלֵּל that occurs only ten times in the OT with the meaning 'to confess'. Six of these occur related to this genre of prayers (Balentine 1993, p. 103). They are also more elaborate than other prose prayers and utilise their language eclectically, using various other types of prayer to combine some elements to move from ascription to confession and petition. The last characteristic is that they are penitential (as also found in 1 Ki 8:46–49; Dn 9:5 presumably utilises 1 Ki 8:47), using the same basis for penitence as those described by the Deuteronomistic editors found in Deuteronomy 28's theology of retribution (Towner 1971, p. 211) and influenced by priestly and Ezekielian circles (Dn 9:4–19) in a montage with an apocalyptic narrative based on the first apocalyptic vision of Zechariah (1:7–17) (Venter 2005, p. 420). The prayer's contents are concerned with Israel and God's relation, with Israel the disobedient one praying for redemption and God depicted as, historically, the merciful one. According to the apocalyptic deterministic viewpoint, the prayer's outcome is that God, the sovereign ruler of the world, alone can change the direction of history. It is motivated by the interests of God's name. The prayer's themes develop against the background of the restoration of the temple and its cult in Jerusalem (Venter 2005, p. 420).

■ Prayer portrays character

The last aspect of prayer is that it functions in Hebrew (and Aramaic) narrative as a literary means for portraying character because what one says (or does not say) to and about God betrays inner desires, intentions and motives (Balentine 1993, p. 89). It also serves as a principal narrative technique that helps the reader evaluate the relationship between what characters say and what they do (Alter 1981, p. 66). Lastly, prayer also delineates divine character because characters talk about God, providing insight into how they perceive God's identity and character. It can be accepted that prayer in the biblical narrative does not intend to provide what was prayed at specific historical events literally but serves as 'literary programmatic creations' put into the historical figures' mouths. The purpose of the prayer is to convey the editors' ideological-political and theological concerns (Balentine 1993, p. 89). Such prayers are usually only loosely connected to the narrative framework, as is the case in Daniel 9's prayer, proving that they were consciously composed to serve as independent literary creations with purposes devised by the narrators or editors. The uneasy relation of the prayer in Daniel 9 to the chapter's primary narrative stratum demonstrates the point. What is essential, though, is that the prayer should be read and interpreted in relation to the narrative in which it is set (Balentine 1993, p. 104).

Daniel's prayers are characterised by their proclamation of God's sovereignty and rule over the earth and all kings (Dn 2:20–22), serving as a 'counter-history' to the ubiquitous Babylonian, Persian and (later) Seleucid monumental claims of their kings to be 'the king of all kings' (Smith-Christopher 2001, p. 270). Other characteristics are their petitions for divine intervention (Dn 9:17–19), the granting of divine forgiveness (Dn 9:4–11) and gratitude for prayers that are answered (Dn 2:23). The prayers are formulated in terms of wisdom motifs such as 'wisdom', 'power', 'deposes and sets up', 'darkness and light' (2:20–23) and with 'wisdom' and 'power' forming an *inclusio* with solid political overtones (Smith-Christopher 2001, p. 286). King Nebuchadnezzar's prayer connects directly to these themes when the king confesses the Most High's sovereign rule that lasts forever (Dn 34:35).¹¹⁰

110. The 'power' attributed to Nebuchadnezzar is not the same as that ascribed to Daniel by the narrator (Dn2:37). Daniel says in his interpretation of the dream that the 'God of Heaven' has given Nebuchadnezzar the kingdom, 'power' [חַסְדָּא], might, and glory. None of these terms are גְּבוּרָה, the 'power' of God that God exclusively gives to Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar gloats over his might (Dn 4:27), but it cannot be compared to the superlative power given to his official (Smith-Christopher 2001, p. 288).

■ Conclusion

The research showed that it is impossible to consider the prayers and references to prayer in the book of Daniel in isolation from broader theological themes such as the cult and the need to redefine Judeans' identity as a people and distinct religious tradition. Before the Babylonian exile of the 6th-century BCE, Israel's cult cannot be understood apart from the temple representing God's presence and reign in the world. When the Babylonian soldiers destroyed the temple in 586 BCE and took away Judeans from their country, it forced them to rethink their cult and redefine it in new concepts. Judeans shared the same fate in the 2nd-century BCE when Antiochus IV Epiphanes desecrated and dishonoured the altar. The notion of individual and collective prayer was not novel to exilic Judeans, but they redescribed it to form the cult's heart in the new circumstances that necessitated the temple cult's replacement.

The prayer of penitence found in Chapter 9 is dissonant because it is secondary, ignores the prophecy's thematic unity, interrupts the logical narrative sequence, does not fit well into the context and concerns itself with themes unrelated to the meaning of Jeremiah's prophecy. The prayer consists of ascription (v. 4), confession (vv. 5–14) and petition (vv. 15–19). It does not develop logically because the ascription is to God, who remained faithful to the obedient, while the confession refers to God's righteousness in contrast to Israel's sins. It seems that the prayer finds it impossible to accept the inevitability of the curse of God's judgement as a deserved punishment for these sins without coming back to God's grace in the past time and again.

The references to prayer in Daniel portray the prayers' characters because it betrays their inner desires, intentions, and motives to help the reader evaluate what characters say and do and delineate divine character because characters' prayers and references to prayer show how they perceive God. Both Daniel and the kings' prayers proclaim God's sovereignty and rule over the earth and all kings as a 'counter-history' to the non-Jewish kings' claims to be 'the king of all kings'. They are formulated in terms of wisdom motifs in an *inclusio* with political overtones.

Prayer in Ezra and Nehemiah

Sebastian J Floor

Bible translation consultant with Seed Company
(a member of the Wycliffe Global Alliance),
Arlington, Texas, United States of America

■ Introduction

The restoration after the Exile was a unique time in the history of God's people, Israel. Ezra and Nehemiah were two exceptional agents of change during that unique period of time, and in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, prayer fulfilled a prominent role alongside their reforms. The prayers of Ezra and Nehemiah can be best understood in the wider context of these respective books, which cover the history of Israel's restoration after the Exile. These two books contain some of the more explicitly prayer-focused writings of the Old Testament (OT), giving us, among other things, a personal glimpse into the hearts of the two major leaders of this time of renewal and restoration.

Looking at these prayers from a Biblical-Theological perspective can be helpful. By acknowledging the historical and thematic flow of the complete OT, a Biblical Theology approach will research the place and function of the two books in the history of revelation and in the history of redemption. Starting with the post-exilic restoration and reformation under Ezra and Nehemiah, the writing, compilation and editing of Scripture entered a time of flowering. The process of canonisation continued during this time when

How to cite: Floor, SJ 2023, 'Prayer in Ezra and Nehemiah', in AJ Coetsee & FP Viljoen (eds.), *Biblical Theology of prayer in the Old Testament*, Reformed Theology in Africa Series, vol. 12, AOSIS Books, Cape Town, pp. 175–193. <https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2023.BK417.11>

there was no more original revelation by prophets or any other spiritual offices in ancient Israel (Russell 1960, pp. 59–61). The time of the prophets ended with Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

Comparing Scripture with Scripture will help identify links and analogies with other prayers of the OT scriptures. This will be of particular interest when we investigate the similarities between the prayers in Ezra and Nehemiah and the Psalter, for instance. A Biblical-Theological approach will be approaching Ezra–Nehemiah and the prayers contained in them in a wider context of the developing faith of Israel and may offer new perspectives on the development of OT spirituality.

The central aim of this chapter is therefore to analyse the prayers in Ezra and Nehemiah in their historical context and in the context of the wider history of revelation without neglecting attention to the actual contents of these prayers.

The layout of the chapter is as follows: In the first section, Ezra and Nehemiah as well as their respective ministries and work will be localised within their historical context, especially what Ezra and Nehemiah each achieved in that time. The restoration of Israel in the Promised Land, followed by a renewal of religious zeal, OT spirituality and Mosaic Law-abiding paints a background for the many short and long prayers written down. The second section deals with the practice and contents of the prayers in the context of Ezra and Nehemiah's work. This section has two parts: first, each of the prayers are listed and described, together with the accompanying practices and expressions. The second part is a more detailed analysis of one of the two long prayers (Neh 9), investigating the segmentation and thematic flow. The contents of the prayers are the focus here. The revelation of the character and nature of God and the spiritual and theological development of Israel up to that point receive special attention. The third section is the heart of the chapter: here, the prayers in Ezra and Nehemiah are compared with other similar OT prayers in the Writings and especially in the Psalms (Ps 105; 106; 135; 136; etc.). The purpose will be to determine similarities with these other prayers and to determine what is unique regarding the prayers of Ezra and Nehemiah. Out of the uniqueness of Ezra's and Nehemiah's prayers, conclusions are drawn about the progression in the history of revelation. The hypothesis presented here is that there was indeed a uniqueness about the prayers of Ezra and Nehemiah that contributed to the setting of the scene of the New Testament (NT).

■ Section 1: Localising Ezra and Nehemiah in the context of history

The first step in our investigation is to localise Ezra and Nehemiah – and their prayers – in history, assuming that the historical context will shed light on those prayers.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah reflect a time of major transition in Israel. In 587 BCE, Jerusalem was destroyed and a large part of the population of Judah was deported to Babylonia. In 539 BCE, King Cyrus of Persia came to power, and a year later he sent a small group of exiles home, led by Zerubbabel, to set up an autonomous Jewish state within the Persian Empire (Goldsworthy 1991, p. 195). Inspired by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, a smaller version of the temple was rebuilt and completed by Zerubbabel between 538 BCE and 516 BCE (cf. Ezr 5:1–2). Only after a more than 60-year silence, in about 454 BCE, Ezra came to Jerusalem ‘when the emperor commissioned Ezra to enforce the Law of Moses’ (Kidner 1979, p. 13). A few years later, Nehemiah was appointed governor in 445 BCE (Kidner 1979, p. 15), and from 430 BCE, Nehemiah served his second term in Jerusalem. During this whole ‘second exodus’, the disappointments were many: not all of the people returned from exile, the prophecies of an exalted Israel were not realised as they continued to exist within a larger empire and were ‘only a pale shadow of the predicted glorious kingdom of the people of God’, the returning exiles experienced stiff resistance from local and neighbouring groups, the temple was pale in comparison to the first, and there was carelessness regarding the temple cult and the Law (Goldsworthy 1991, pp. 195–196).

Under the strong leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, the small remnant, as prophesied by Isaiah, for the first time truly became ‘People of the Book’. The Law of Moses was taught and obeyed, and all of it was undergirded by the prayers of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Coming out of the Exile and the temple cult being restored were dramatic new developments in the history of Israel – ‘it was death to make way for a rebirth’ (Kidner 1979, p. 13). The transformation was profound. Kidner (1979) argued that it was:

[N]o longer a kingdom but a little flock with the makings of a church, [...] an Israel cut down almost to its roots, but drawing new vitality from its neglected source of nourishment in the Mosaic Law. (p. 23)

The time that Israel was entering in to was a Torah-centered phase. Ezra and Nehemiah’s work in Jerusalem was a significant turning point in Israel’s history. There was not only a reformation, a covenant renewal, but also – and especially – a spiritual revival and even a national consolidation. An awareness and confession of sin and the consequences of sin, namely the Exile, pervades the prayers.

In 450 BCE, Ezra and Nehemiah found a small and threatened covenant people in Judah. Random idolatry seemed to have been something of the pre-exilic past, but lukewarm adherence to the Law was rampant. Even the prophets Haggai (1:2) and Malachi (1:6–7; 10–14; 2:8, 11–14; 3:5) referred to it. The spiritual reformation under Ezra and Nehemiah included Torah-reading,

reforming the temple service and the Levites, putting an end to mixed marriages with neighbouring peoples, removing the political influence of Israel's enemies, ending business on the Sabbath (Neh 13:15-22) and introducing the ceremonies of the Feast of Tabernacles for the first time since the time of the conquest under Joshua (Neh 8:17). All this was consummated in the renewal of the covenant (Neh 9:38), marked by deep grieving as well as great joy (Neh 8:11, 17; 12:27, 43).

The remnant was indeed not given to random idolatry as before the Exile, but the situation that Ezra and Nehemiah encountered was one of a lack of Torah-reading, compromising around work and business on the Sabbath, lukewarm cultic service, disregard for the rights of the poor and, more dangerously for future continuity of the people of the LORD, the significant inter-marriage with neighbouring peoples, even among the leaders and Levites. The unprotected city of Jerusalem was another risk.

John Bright argued that following the restoration under Ezra and Nehemiah, the result of their actions and words was a 'Holy Commonwealth based on the keeping of the Law', the 'Restoration community' and 'an Apocalyptic kingdom established by the direct activity of God' (1953, pp.170-171). Torah-abiding and a restored temple service are the consequences of such divine intervention, as commented on by Bright (1953):

[L]ike Ezekiel 40-48, the '*Civitas Dei*' as a religious community centered around the purified temple and its cult, has already foreshadowed this ideal of a people holy unto God. (p. 172)

The return after the Exile and the restoration under Ezra and Nehemiah mark the end of the prophetic movement. The Law became the passion of Judaism, saving Israel's faith (Bright 1953, pp. 175-176).

Ezra was called a 'scribe skilled in the Law of Moses' (Ezr 7:6), an expert on the Torah. The Torah scrolls were available to him, but there is no evidence that prevents the assumption that significant additional parts of the OT were most likely available to him as well, even if in fragmented and draft format only. Because of the new phase of Torah-centric religion initiated by Ezra and Nehemiah, this post-exilic time was also to be the last few centuries of canon forming. It was the time of all the post-exilic Scripture writing and redacting and finalisation of the OT canon (Russell 1960, pp. 61-62), as well as the beginning of the synagogues as local venues of Torah-reading and teaching. It was also the beginning of Phariseism (Russell 1960, pp. 49-51).

With this historical context in mind, Ezra and Nehemiah's prayers assume a unique quality. According to Kidner (1979), prayer was a central theme in Ezra and Nehemiah:

Prayer is woven thoroughly into the fabric of these two books. It takes a variety of forms, from a momentary flash of mental prayer to an eloquent address, accompanied on a penitential occasion by such outward gestures as fasting,

pulling out the hair, rending the garments, weeping, casting oneself down (cf. *Ezr* 9:3, 10:1), or wearing sackcloth and putting earth on one's head (*Neh* 9:1); or again, on a joyful occasion reinforcing praise with the music and shouts of acclamation. (pp. 24–26)

Kidner (1979, p. 24) argues that this 'reflects a mature Old Testament faith'. There is a strong sense of history and of Israelite solidarity. Ezra became a towering figure: 'Ezra's work was attended by a "revival emotion"' (Bright 1953, p. 173), and the same vigorous expression of faith can be observed in Nehemiah. Ezra gave Israel a new attitude to Scripture, a right kind of biblical expertise, clear revelation and truth to be understood. Nehemiah 8:10 is a verse about not only reading the Torah but making its meaning clear and well-understood (Kidner 1979, p. 27). Accompanied by confession of national sin, practical and real repentance, restoration of the cult and covenant alignment, this maturity is further exemplified by Nehemiah's God-centeredness (Kidner 1979):

Nehemiah is committing himself and his opponents to the verdict of God. In other words, he is looking beyond success or failure, beyond the measures he is taking and must take against the opposition, beyond even the verdict of history. To have God's ready help, and, above all, God's 'well-done', is his hunger and thirst and the direction of his praying. It is not surprising that his book closes with this prayer. (p. 26)

With the historical context of the Ezra and Nehemiah prayers briefly sketched, we now turn to the contents of these prayers.

■ Section 2: The contents of the prayers in Ezra and Nehemiah

After establishing the historical context of Ezra and Nehemiah and the national spiritual-religious restoration, and establishing Ezra and Nehemiah's personal spiritual leadership in this regard, an analysis of the actual prayers in both books is next. The purpose of this section is not to analyse these prayers in detail – space forbids – but to investigate the prayer patterns that may be significant for a Biblical-Theological interpretation of these prayers. This analysis of the textual content of the prayers will give attention to not only the actions and postures of these prayers, which for their own sake are quite unique in the OT. The practice of prayer in Ezra will be discussed first, followed by the prayers in Nehemiah. In this section, the contents of those prayers are briefly investigated as well, while the long prayer of Nehemiah (9:5b–37) will be investigated in more detail.

■ Overview of prayer in Ezra and Nehemiah

Any reading of Ezra and Nehemiah highlights the sheer quantity of prayers in Ezra and Nehemiah, marking Ezra and Nehemiah as special in this regard.

Ezra and Nehemiah practised both private prayer (Neh 2:4) and public prayer (Ezr 9; Neh 9). Prayer postures were also notable. In Ezra 9:5, Ezra is found kneeling, with hands lifted up, and even casting himself down (Ezr 10:1). Prayer was accompanied by fasting (Ezr 8:23, 9:5, and 10:6) and by expressions of emotion (Ez 9:3 - *'I tore my garment and my cloak and pulled hair from my head and my beard while I sat appalled until the evening sacrifice'*). The intensity of the prayers is observed in the prayers in Ezra 9 and 10, and in Nehemiah 1 and 9. Ezra's prayer of penitence and confession was followed by the people *'weeping bitterly'* (Ezr 10:1). This is not necessarily unique to Ezra and Nehemiah, but the sheer emotion displayed in both books paints a picture of a heightened spirituality in the face of significant internal lukewarmness and compromise (as observed earlier in 'Section 1: Localising Ezra and Nehemiah in the context of history'), as well as the significant external opposition encountered.

In Ezra, there is one long prayer of confession and penitence, which is found in 9:6-15. In Nehemiah, there are two long prayers (Neh 1:5-11; 9:5b-37). The long prayer in Nehemiah 9:5b-37, also called the Nehemiah Memorial, is one of the longest prayers in Scripture with a total of 32 verses, similar in length to Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 8:23-53 at the dedication of the first temple with 31 verses. The events around the prayer of Nehemiah 9:5-35 are that it was public, following after fasting, mourning and the reading of the Torah, and followed by joy and feasting. This prayer is unique and receives special attention below.

What now follows is a brief analysis of the contents of the short and long prayers.

■ An analysis of the short prayers

In Ezra, there is a tone of thanksgiving and confidence in YHWH's sovereignty:

Praise be to the LORD, the God of our ancestors, who has put it into the king's heart to bring honor to the house of the LORD in Jerusalem in this way [...], because the hand of the LORD my God was on me, I took courage and gathered leaders from Israel to go up with me. (Ezr 7:27-28)¹¹¹

Ezra 8:21-23 is an account of how, by the Ahava canal, Ezra led his fellow travellers in fasting and prayer for a safe journey: 'The gracious hand of the LORD is on everyone who looks to him' (v. 22) '[...] so we fasted and implored God for this [i.e. safe passage] and he listened to our entreaty' (v. 21). A report on the answered prayer occurs in Verse 31.

111. All the quotations are from the NIV.

In Nehemiah several short prayers were recorded:

- **Nehemiah 1:5–11:** The first prayer in the Book of Nehemiah. The term *'remembrance'* in prayer is introduced here.
- **Nehemiah 2:4:** 'The king said to me, "What is it you want?" Then I prayed to the God of Heaven, and I answered the king, "If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it".'
- **Nehemiah 4:4–5:** 'Hear us, our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders.'
- **Nehemiah 5:19:** 'Remember me with favor, my God, for all that I have done for these people.'
- **Nehemiah 6:9:** Another one-line prayer, after being threatened: 'But I prayed, "Do strengthen my hands".'
- **Nehemiah 13:14:** 'Remember me for this, my God, and do not blot out what I have so faithfully done for the house of my God and its services.'
- **Nehemiah 13:22:** 'Remember me for this also, my God, and show mercy to me according to your great love.'
- **Nehemiah 13:29:** 'Remember them, my God, because they defiled the priestly office and the covenant of the priesthood and of the Levites.'
- **Nehemiah 13:31:** Ending the book of Nehemiah: 'Remember me with favor, my God'.

The frequency of these short prayers of both Nehemiah and Ezra points to a new Law-abiding and Law-based 'spirituality' in the context of the restoration of the temple cult, the priesthood, the temple choirs, the Feast of Tabernacles, Scripture reading, social justice against local internal mistreatment, Sabbath protection, and ending of mixed marriages. The recurring refrain of the זָכַר, the memorial prayer: 'Remember me, my God'. זָכַר is repeated six times in Nehemiah's prayers. These 'remember me' prayers by Nehemiah display his dependence on the LORD's continual love and intervention collectively and also personally.

■ An analysis of the long prayers

In Ezra 9 and Nehemiah 9, the long prayers are encountered. Preceding the long prayer in Ezra 9 is the prelude (v. 5), with the actions accompanying the prayer: self-abasement, cloak-tearing, falling on the knees with hands spread out to the LORD his God. Ezra 9:6–15 is then the actual prayer, which can be segmented in the following way:

Verses 6–7: Shame and disgrace because of our guilt.

Verses 8–9: The LORD was gracious to us to lead us here, with the favour of the king.

Verses 10–12: But in spite of that, we have sinned by intermarriage.

Verses 13-15: You have punished us less than what we deserve. You are righteous, and we cannot stand in your presence.

Like Nehemiah, Ezra stressed the graciousness as well as the righteousness of the LORD. What makes the long prayer of Ezra different is the strong emphasis on guilt, and like Daniel 9, his stress on the remnant who returned from exile.

The Nehemiah Memorial, Nehemiah 9:5b-37, is the longest prayer in Ezra-Nehemiah and merits special attention by the sheer range of genres and themes converging in it. Noss and Thomas (2005, p. 423) typify the form of the prayer in Hebrew as rhythmic prose. The first question to answer is the genre (or genres) of the Nehemiah Memorial. Scholars agree that the Nehemiah Memorial is a mixture of confession and communal lament. Von Rad is quoted by Williamson (1985, p. 307) as saying that the prayer is a text that he categorises as part of a group he terms 'doxologies of judgement' because of their formulaic confession, 'you are in the right',¹¹² as seen in Verse 33. The function of this confession is 'to acknowledge, as an act of worship, that God is justified in his judgment on the worshiper' and 'it constitutes the most exalted, because most objective, form of confession that the OT knows'.

The passage is introduced in hymnic form (Williamson 1985, p. 307). Williamson himself agrees that the final section has elements of communal lament. There is an element of veiled petition (v. 32), as well as of confession (vv. 33-35) and lament proper (vv. 36-37). Smith (2010), in turn, agrees that this prayer is a confession:

Nehemiah's long prayer indicates 'that this actually involved hearing God's voice through the reading of Scripture as well as a period of worship and confessional prayer. Nehemiah's prayer in 1:5-9 recognized the need for the people to confess their sins, and finally in this passage it appears that many did just that'. (p. 173)

Noss and Thomas (2005) confirm the theme of confession of unfaithfulness in the Nehemiah Memorial, but within the context of the faithfulness of the LORD:

A dominant theme in this prayer is God's promise of land and Israel's failure to live as God's people. Thus, they do not possess the land, but they live under foreign rule in their own land, and this creates hardship for them. The prayer is not a simple appeal for deliverance from this situation, but rather ends with a confession of sin and a cry of distress [...] After the reading of the Law, the community is led in a prayer of confession by Levites. In preparation for the prayer there is a cry of distress followed by an invitation to stand for prayer. The prayer itself is a survey of the history of Israel with emphasis on the acts and faithfulness of God and the sins and unfaithfulness of the people of Israel.

112. cf. 'Gerichtsdoxologie', *Gesammelte Studien*. For some discussion, cf. Ezra 9, *Form*, and the Comment on Verse 15 of that chapter.

It is a confession to God about how the people understood their history and themselves. The review of the past is a means for critical self-reflection in the light of God's commands and acts of mercy. (pp. 423–424)

In terms of segmenting the prayer, Noss and Thomas (2005, pp. 423–424) proposed the following divisions of the Nehemiah Memorial:

- **Verse 6:** Creation
- **Verses 7–8:** Covenant with Abraham
- **Verses 9–11:** Exodus from Egypt
- **Verses 12–21:** Wilderness wanderings
- **Verses 22–25:** Possession of the land
- **Verses 26–31:** Rebellion
- **Verses 32–37:** Final plea.

A more detailed segmentation of the Nehemiah Memorial is the following:

- **Nehemiah 9:5–6:** Praise of the supremacy of God in creation.
- **Nehemiah 9:7–8:** Praise for the call of the patriarchs.
- **Nehemiah 9:9–12:** Praise for the exodus from Egypt.
- **Nehemiah 9:13–15:** Praise for the giving of the Torah at Sinai.
- **Nehemiah 9:16–18:** First confession: arrogance and stiff-necked people of Israel; golden calf.

First confession of the credo and compassion: 'But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Therefore you did not desert them'. (v. 17)

- **Nehemiah 9: 19–21:** Thanks for compassion and not abandoning them: manna and more for 40 years.

Second repetition of compassion: 'Because of your *great compassion*'. (v. 21)

- **Nehemiah 9:22–25:** Thanksgiving for the conquest of Canaan.

Third repetition of compassion: 'They revelled in your *great goodness*'. (v. 25)

- **Nehemiah 9:26–28:** Second confession: Constant disobedience and oppression, and deliverance.

Fourth repetition of compassion: 'From Heaven you heard them, and in your *great compassion* you gave them deliverers'. (v. 27)

Fifth repetition of compassion: 'And when they cried to you, you heard from Heaven, and in your *great compassion* gave them deliverers'. (v. 28)

- **Nehemiah 9:29–31:** Warning through the prophets in your patience, but ongoing arrogance and stiff-necked.

Sixth repetition of compassion based on the credo: 'You are *gracious* and a *merciful* God'. (v. 31)

- **Nehemiah 9:32–35:** Plea: 'Look on our hardship'.

Seventh repetition of the Name and the climatic summary: 'In all that has happened to us, you have remained righteous, you have acted faithfully, while we acted wickedly'. (v. 33)

- **Nehemiah 9:36–37:** Repetition of the plea: 'See, we are slaves today'.

Several characteristics of the Nehemiah Memorial can be highlighted: Firstly, this is the longest prayer in Nehemiah, with 32 verses. This prayer is also longer than any in Ezra and Daniel. It is a narration prayer in second-person singular, addressed to God. God is the subject of covenant good 40 times.

Secondly, the prominence of the credo (Neh 9:17; cf. Ex 34:6; Nm 14:18; Ps 103:8; 145:8; Nah 1:3) as a memorial of the Name is notable: The LORD is characterised as gracious, forgiving, loving, merciful, compassionate, faithful and good. There are seven statements of the Name from the credo, quoted directly or indirectly. These seven repetitions are references to his 'compassion' [Hebrew: רַחוּם] and related concepts like 'grace' [Hebrew: חַנוּן] and goodness. The LORD is righteous; he keeps his covenant, which is meant by him keeping his promise (Neh 9:8, 35). Williamson (1985) also highlighted the particular characteristics of God in Nehemiah 9:

It will also be shown that each section focuses upon one particular characteristic of God, usually expressed in a well-known phrase whose significance is thus elaborated by the recital, e.g.:

'You alone are the LORD' (v. 6);

'You are righteous' (v. 8), etc. (pp. 307–308)

Thirdly, the twofold reference to the Spirit (Neh 9:20, 30) as God's invisible but empowering and life-giving presence is of interest. This is unique in the prayers of Israel. None of the historical psalms, Solomon's dedication of the temple or Daniel's prayer of confession contain references to the Spirit of God. It does occur twice in Psalm 104:

When you hide your face they are dismayed, when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth. (vv. 29–30)

And lastly, the genre of the Memorial is simultaneously a prayer of confession and covenant remembrance [זִכָּר]. The confession and remembrance are embedded in praise and thanksgiving: praise of God in his eternal self, his name, followed by his works of creation, before moving to the covenant faithfulness in the history of Israel. Why is this Memorial addressed to the LORD? The LORD already knows all of this history, so the purpose of the

Memorial is to remind him of what he has done and to remind the people of Israel of the LORD's actions in history. The verb זָכַר is widely used in the OT in the sense of being conscious of, keeping continually in mind, with the idea of doing something about it. For instance, Genesis 7:1, where the LORD *remembered* Noah. It is not that God forgot about him, but instead that he all along kept his plight in mind and will now act accordingly. The same in the Nehemiah Memorial: it is a form of praise and thanksgiving to God that simultaneously serves as a reminder to the one praying and those who heard him that God is faithful to his covenant and that he will save once more. This *thanksgiving of reminding*, so to say, implies a plea, a petition that the LORD will act again, will intervene once more and will bring salvation. The fulfillment of these expectations was only seen with the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. These זָכַר prayers are not unique to Nehemiah. They also occur eight times in the Psalms¹¹³ as thankful remembrance, but they could be identified as particularly prominent in Nehemiah.

In summary, the shorter prayers are petitions for help, protection and vindication. The longer prayers in Ezra and Nehemiah focus on confession of national sin and the expression of guilt and shame, accompanied by memorials of the great deeds of the LORD in the past. There is an interplay of thanksgiving, confession and plea as seen in the זָכַר prayers, where the centrality of the LORD and the covenant and the name of the LORD (the credo) are major themes. The prayers of Ezra and Nehemiah were prayed in the historical context of confession, repentance and restoration after the 80 years of lukewarmness following the return from exile. The prayers in these two books are frequent and prominent, touching on themes of confession, pleas for help and deliverance, especially in the Nehemiah Memorial, an emphasis on the LORD and his name, his covenant faithfulness and compassion despite severe national sin.

■ Section 3: Ezra and Nehemiah's prayers in the history of revelation

The final step of our investigation is to situate the prayers in Ezra and Nehemiah within a Biblical Theology framework, in other words, how they align with, or even mark, the next stage in the history of salvation. We need to ask what is similar to what has gone before, bringing continuity, and what is a new development. Do these prayers in Ezra and Nehemiah mark

113. The '*remembrance of your holiness*' (in 97:12 and 30:5); God's and the righteous' memory lasting forever (Ps 102:13, 111:4, 112:6, and 135:13). Psalm 145:7 mentions the pouring forth of the remembrance of his manifold goodness. Of particular interest is the parallelism in Psalm 6:6 (ESV) '*For in death there is no remembrance of you / in Sheol who will give you praise?*', to be contrasted with the memory of the wicked that will disappear (Ps 9:7, 34:16, and 109:15).

any progression in the history of revelation? Where do these prayers fit in, in the unfolding of the revelation of God himself and in the development of Israel as a community of faith? How will Biblical Theology help us understand prayer in Ezra–Nehemiah better? What has been the new revelation and the new development? This section attempts to partially answer these questions. Goldsworthy (1991) has raised similar questions:

'These prophets (i.e. Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi), together with the narratives of Ezra and Nehemiah, made it plain that the restored nation is not the kingdom of God. What, then, is its purpose? We can only surmise that it reminds the people that God is still active in the history of salvation, and that at the same time it invites true faith to look beyond the present experience to some greater fulfillment' (1991, p. 196). There is 'an unfinished story'. (p. 197)

This section includes, first of all, intertextual comparisons, comparing some of the prayers with similar prayers elsewhere. This is followed by an attempt to describe what is similar and what is unique about these prayers in their context, with the purpose of placing these prayers in the wider context of the OT and then the NT salvation history.

■ Intertextual comparisons

The intertextuality of the prayers of Ezra and Nehemiah, and especially the long prayer of Nehemiah in Chapter 9, echoes the long historical psalms (Ps 78, 105, 106) and Daniel's prayer in Daniel 9:4b–19.

Williamson (1985) sets the scene with this observation regarding Nehemiah 9:

[7]his reinforces the effectiveness of the confession for once again it is set within a context of praise. This separates our chapter from several of the other doxologies of judgment (e.g. Ez 9; Dan 9), but draws it closer not only to Ps 106, as already seen, but in particular to the doxologies in the book of Amos (4:13; 5:8–9; 9:5–6).¹¹⁴ Finally, the closing verses of the chapter have, not unnaturally, been compared with the psalms of communal lament. (p. 307)

Noss and Thomas (1985, p. 423) argued that the prayer (of Neh 9, author) is similar to the historical psalms that combine a recounting of history with another theme:

- **Psalm 78:** History and instruction
- **Psalms 105; 136:** History and thanksgiving
- **Psalm 135:** History and penitence.

114. Cf. Crenshaw (1975). According to Crenshaw, these doxologies 'seem to have been used on special days of penitence and confession' during the exilic or early post-exilic period (p. 143). In view of the present literary setting of Nehemiah 9, there is no reason why our author should not in fact have used material drawn directly from its original liturgical setting in the cult.

However, not all scholars believe that there is a strong link between Nehemiah 9 and the Psalter. Williamson (1985) observed the following:

Observing that the overall structure of the prayer is confession, transition by *'and now'*, and petition, he denies that we should look to prophecy (contra Gunkel) or the Psalter (e.g. Ps 38; 51; 106; 130) for analogies. Rather, he finds many brief examples of this pattern in both individual and collective confessions in the historical books; cf. Num 22:34; 1 Sam 15:24–25; 2 Sam 24:10; Exod 10:16–17 (individual) and Num 21:7; Exod 32:31–32; Judg 10:15; 1 Sam 12:10. This is sufficient to suggest that we are dealing in Neh 9 with a form of confession deeply rooted in Israelite life, not restricted to the cult, as narrowly defined. Here, however, the form is elaborated under the influence both of the cult, as the setting and language show, and of the Law, which has now begun to replace God himself as the party against whom sin has been committed. (p. 306)

By way of contrast, Williamson (1985) wrote that:

[/]t would be churlish to deny all contact with the Psalter. The extended historical retrospect at once invites comparison with a number of the Psalms. In particular, Nehemiah 9 is often compared with Psalm 106 precisely because both passages use historical recollection as a vehicle for confession and as a ground on which to base an appeal for mercy. (pp. 306–307)

At the same time, he argues (Williamson 1985), the Nehemiah Memorial:

[...] undoubtedly comes closer to poetry than Ezra 9:6–15 or Neh 1:5–11, with which it otherwise has many points of similarity, and yet it falls far short, from a formal point of view, of most of the poetry in the Psalter. (p. 306)

Analysis of the similarities with the memorials of Psalms 78 and 105–106 begs the question of what is unique about the Nehemiah Memorial. A full comparison with Psalms 105 and 106 and the Nehemiah Memorial requires a lengthy investigation beyond the scope of this זָכָר, but this has been conducted well by Fensham (1981). He compared the contents of the poems of Nehemiah 9 and the four Psalms 105, 106, 135 and 136, all being poems of history. But there are differences: Psalm 105 is a hymn, Psalm 106 is a lament (a 'hymnic lament', quoting Crüseman), Psalm 135 is a liturgical hymn and Psalm 136 is a thanksgiving song (1981, p. 38). It is very probable that we have a kind of 'hymnic thanksgiving' in Nehemiah 9, but at the same time, 'in terms of contents it is a penitential song in the form of a prayer' (1981, p. 39). Fensham lists and compares the different traditions in Nehemiah 9 and Psalms 105, 106, 135 and 136 and found that only Nehemiah 9 and Psalm 136 mention creation, only Nehemiah 9 and Psalm 105 have the patriarchal tradition, the saving at the Sea of Reeds is in Nehemiah 9:9–11 and 136:13–15, and the wandering in the desert in Nehemiah 9 and Psalms 105, 106, and 136. The rebellion in wilderness is mentioned in Nehemiah 9 and Psalm 106 (1981, p. 42). The Nehemiah Memorial contains most of the traditions but, jointly with the four historical psalms, there is an absence of the David and Zion traditions as seen in Psalm 78, which is 'a Psalm of

Asaph' and taken to be much earlier and pre-exilic. In terms of the timing and purpose of these poems, Fensham (1981) wrote the following:

We have here poems which have originated between the early post-exilic period and the time of the Chronicler. Why should we have such an interest in those times in the early history of Israel? Was it only a historical interest, an upsurge in interest in the old history of the forefathers, a will to collect and repeat the ancient history? Or do we have an actualisation of history with a kerygma for the people for whom it is intended? In a very important contribution to the understanding of tradition and Biblical Theology, Hartmut Gese states: 'Complexes of historical text cannot be characterized as biblical archives. They give an account of Israel's past in order to provide a point of orientation for present self-understanding'. (p. 45)

Fensham (1981, p. 48) suggests as a possible setting for these poems the Passover: in Exodus 12:25-27, the command is given to commemorate the deliverance from Egypt at Passover. It is very possible that during the Passover these historical psalms were performed as a memorial of the LORD's great deeds in salvation history. Fensham (1981) concluded his observations regarding Nehemiah 9 in this way:

So the post-exilic Jewish community with reference to the beliefs of the ancestors used the history of these ancestors, reinterpreted in the present, as a kind of credo. The confession praises the LORD for his intervention in the past of Israel and his grace in spite of the selfishness of his people. For the Jews who have returned from exile and who lived under difficult circumstances this confession was of great value to build out a new community of faith. (pp. 50-51)

■ What is unique about the Ezra and Nehemiah prayers

Referring to some of the prayers of both Ezra and Nehemiah, Williamson described them as unique. Williamson (1985):

As in the case of the prayers of Ezra 9 and Nehemiah 1, no exact parallels to this passage are to be found. (p. 306)

Whereas there are more similarities between the Nehemiah Memorial and other OT poems, even the Nehemiah Memorial has its own distinctiveness, as pointed out by Fensham. What in Ezra-Nehemiah is the same as other intertextuals, and what is distinct? What is distinct is the intensity of the renewal and restoration of the Law and temple service under Ezra and Nehemiah. What is unique in these prayers is the following:

- The sheer volume of prayers (see Section 2).
- The intensity of the prayers and the actions accompanying them.
- The many short, one-liner prayers interspersed through Ezra and Nehemiah, especially in Nehemiah.
- The practicality of many of the prayers in both Ezra and Nehemiah regarding short-term needs, like safety in travel and favour with the king.

- The new and previously non-existent reality around these prayers. The absence of the prophets, the emergence of new types of spiritual leaders in Israel, namely the political (Nehemiah) and the expert on the Law (Ezra). Such a collaboration, and historical account thereof, was never seen in Israel before.

As seen in Section 2, the convergence of the historical account of the Nehemiah Memorial, the confession, the use of the credo and invocation of the Name (i.e. the characteristics of the nature) of YHWH and the frequent appeal to his compassion as an aspect of his Name makes it unique.

The echoes of זָכַר between some selected psalms and the many 'remember me/remember them' זָכַר prayers, especially in Nehemiah, have been recognised, but what is unique in Nehemiah is the sheer number of זָכַר prayers, as observed in Section 2. Also, as observed above, it is the unique blending of historical memorial with repentance and pleas based on YHWH's Name as expressed in the credo (e.g. Neh 9:17) and the seven appeals to his compassion.

Also distinct, and more emphatic, are the many short זָכַר 'memorials' petition prayers in Nehemiah.

More time has passed since the great events of revelation history. Especially for the Nehemiah Memorial, a זָכַר confession and thanksgiving-doxology remembrance, the timing was *circa* 430 BCE. The different traditions referring to the events of salvation history were, at that point, already very much further in the past.

■ Old Testament Biblical-Theological perspective

The analogies of the Nehemiah Memorial with Psalms 105 and 106 point out the fact that even those psalms may have reached their final form in the centuries after the Exile (Allen 1983, p. 42), in the context of a new 'Torah piety'. 'Recent study of the Psalter has suggested that its canonical form is arranged to impose a "Torah piety" on the entire Psalter' (Brueggemann 1997, p. 591). The final redaction of the Psalter is post-exilic, including a few psalms looking back to the destruction of the temple and demise of the people of Israel in Book III, for instance, Psalms 79 and 89.

Allen (2002) points to a unique feature of Psalm 105:

Verses 6–46 function not only as a confession of sin and an interpretation of the Exile as divine punishment; they also stress God's grace and past help, which prompted praise, and so they give confidence that present deportation and dispersal would also end in praise. The focal point of the psalm is not the narrative but vv. 1, 47b, the renewal of praise that only YHWH's reversal of the people's present circumstances can bring about. There is a tension between guilt and praise that only divine forgiveness can resolve. (p. 67)

Psalm 119 is another instance of this expression of individual devotion to the Torah, a Torah-spirituality, which was more pronounced after the Exile, and according to Allen, more specifically after Ezra. Allen (1983) argues for a post-exilic date for Psalm 119 in the context of Torah-oriented wisdom teaching, which is, in his view, the majority position:

In principle there appear to be insufficient grounds for denying a post-exilic origin. In particular the presence of pronounced Aramaisms and terms characteristic of later post-biblical Hebrew [...] is a weighty argument for advocating it. (p. 141)

There are similarities between Ezra 9 (but less so Nehemiah 9) with Daniel 9:4b-19, a prayer which focused on confession and pleas for forgiveness, but like Nehemiah stressing the righteousness of the LORD in bringing the Exile over the people of Israel (Daniel 9:14, 16). The prayers in Ezra and Nehemiah are unique in a unique context of OT history, but also similar to contemporary poems from the Psalter. They show a development in the context of a new piety, religious zeal and repentance, contributing to a new Torah-abiding cult and national religious life between the Testaments.

■ New Testament Biblical-Theological perspective

The reading of the end of the Nehemiah Memorial leaves the lingering impression that for Nehemiah, there is still unfinished business. Goldsworthy (1991, pp. 195-196) mentioned the same: the disappointments, the weakness of the returned community, the threat of enemies around them and the fact that they are still 'slaves' in a greater empire. The book of Nehemiah also ends with a prayer: 'Remember me with favor, my God' (Neh 13:31), concluding the four 'remember me' pleas in Chapter 13, the last chapter of Nehemiah. The question of how the prayers in Ezra and Nehemiah point forward to the coming of Christ is not an easy one to answer. There is very little, if anything, in the texts of Ezra and Nehemiah that suggests that they are prophetic or even typological of the messianic age. Can we see Christ in Ezra and Nehemiah as a whole, not to mention in the prayers that they contain?

With the historical perspective, it is clearer to see how Ezra and Nehemiah, as Law-expert priest and ruler, respectively, in close collaboration and with the help of the LORD, brought about a radical and lasting spiritual reformation in Israel. This reformation introduced a more intense phase of the Torah guardianship.¹¹⁵ The guardianship that Paul referred to in Galatians 3:

115. Russell (1960, pp. 42-57) provides a useful overview of the centrality of the Torah during the inter-testament era.

Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the Law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. So the Law was our guardian until Christ came. (vv. 23–24a)

Kidner (1979, p. 17) points out the following:

‘Out of the ruins of the little kingdom of Judah there had emerged the small community who concern to be the people of God by pedigree and practice shaped into the nation which meets us in the New Testament’, and more even: ‘What we see in Ezra–Nehemiah is an Israel cut down almost to its roots, but drawing new vitality from its neglected source of nourishment in the Mosaic Law and already showing signs, by its new concern for purity, of growing into the Judaism which we meet, both for better and for worse, in the New Testament’. (p. 23)

With a NT perspective it is possible to discern how the centrality of the Torah and covenantal purity during the inter-testamental stage led to an expectant faithful living out their faith in difficult times. The tumultuous centuries of Greek and later Roman rule set the scene for apocalyptic literature and the dawn of messianic expectations that were strong by the time Jesus was born (Russell 1960, p. 129). But all of this had its beginning in the new orientation to the Torah and, thereby, the Mosaic covenant, inaugurated by the epic events occurring around 80 years after the return from the Exile. At the same time, however, an increased and overwrought legalism and ethnocentrism despite clear themes of universal inclusiveness as seen in prophets like Isaiah, Jonah and Micah, for instance, took root. Whether this started soon after the Ezra–Nehemiah restoration or much later is not clear.

As war and culture clashes under various empires increased, this carried Israel into the time of a strong messiah expectation and the rise of apocalyptic literature as the birth of Jesus Christ approached. As much as Phariseeism was opposed to Jesus the Messiah, strongly leaning towards legalism and righteousness by works, Ezra and Nehemiah’s revival and restoration were the beginning of a strong preservative movement of the faithful in Israel before the coming of Christ. This set the scene for this final stretch before the coming of the Messiah. The songs of Zechariah and Mary (Lk 1:46–55, 68–79) and the faith of Simeon and Hannah (Lk 2:25–38) are testimonies to this continuity of the community of the faithful.

In the Nehemiah Memorial, the LORD is pictured as righteous, covenant-fulfilling and compassionate. The frequent repetition of the credo or parts of the credo provides continuity with Exodus 34 and the other references to the credo in the Psalms (103, 145), Nahum 1:3 and Numbers 14:18. This theme of God’s covenantal Name, his character, is echoed and alluded to in the NT, for instance in John 1:16 ‘full of grace and truth’. Carson (1991) wrote:

The glory of God manifest in the incarnate Word was full of grace and truth. In that case John is almost certainly directing his readers to Exodus 33–34. ‘Hesed’ חֶסֶד (including graciousness of love) and ‘emet’ אֱמֶת (truth/faithfulness): this pair of expressions recurs again and again in the Old Testament. (pp. 129–130)

■ Summary

We investigated three contexts of the Nehemiah–Ezra prayers: the historical context of the work of Nehemiah and Ezra, the contents of the prayers in the context of their practice and immediate situation and the context of Biblical Theology and the history of salvation.

We have observed from the historical context of Ezra and Nehemiah the significant spiritual reformation and renewal introduced by the scribe Ezra and the governor Nehemiah, around 80 years after the return from exile of a small remnant. The challenges of the lack of Torah-reading, Sabbath-breaking, mixed marriages and weaknesses in the temple cult were all dramatically reformed under the two leaders, and the narrative accounts of their actions were interspersed with frequent and intense prayers.

The contents of the Nehemiah Memorial prayer of Nehemiah 9 stands out as a unique prayer with several covenant themes converging, from a doxology in the form of historical remembrance of the great redemptive deeds of the LORD to the confession of national sins and pleas for salvation and protection, all within the framework of a thoroughly God-centered and God-focused prayer.

The sevenfold repetition of the credo in this prayer is not only unique in its intensity, but it links this prayer back to other OT prayers and texts and also forward to the NT and the full revelation of grace, love and mercy in Christ.

From a Biblical-Theological perspective, the prayers of Ezra and Nehemiah are unique because they signal a new development in the history of God's people. A significant restoration and renewal took place that, in hindsight, proved to be enduring. Until the Exile, God's ongoing self-revelation was carried forward by leaders like the judges and later the kings, in parallel with the prophets who were the authors of the canonical writings but also the voice of faith and conscience in times of great unfaithfulness and idolatry. After the Exile, all that changed: the covenant and especially the Torah took center-stage to preserve revelation. The voice of the prophets went silent, and there was no more revelation to kings and leaders, but the people of Israel as guardians of the revelation were being preserved by the ongoing centrality of the Torah and the absence of assimilation with neighbouring peoples. In this way, all this was preparatory for the coming of the Messiah 400 years later.

Prayer as remembering the great deeds of the LORD functions as an identification with Israel's past. Nehemiah's prayer was not unique but aligned with parallel post-exilic historical practice.

■ Conclusion

The unique forms of the prayer, the petitions, the short practical prayers, the confessional and penitential laments and repentance prayers and, as a high point, the זָכַר prayers as God-centered and salvation, history-centered prayers have much to teach the modern church. The laments and praises in the context of God's Name and his great deeds in salvation history are a far cry from the individualistic and human-need-centered petitionary prayers of our modern age. Ezra and Nehemiah contain sketches of prayer and prayer practices that are still relevant for today's people of God. The pervasiveness of prayer, the postures of prayer, the passion of the prayers and the contents of the prayers in Ezra and Nehemiah all contribute to a rich picture of a prayer spirituality that could influence how we pray today. Such an understanding will not only enrich our perspective on prayer in the OT in general but will also inform modern practice.

Prayer in Chronicles

Louis C Jonker

Department of Old and New Testament,
Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University,
Stellenbosch, South Africa

■ Introduction

‘Prayer in Chronicles’ is a topic that has attracted numerous scholars’ attention in the past two decades and more (Balentine 1997; Beentjes 2008; Brettler 2017; Heard 2002; Matlock 2017, 2019; Newman 1996; O’Kennedy 2006; Plöger 2000; Reif 2015; Schuller 2017; Throntveit 1987). It is well-known that the Chronicler included excerpts from some psalms that we know from the canonical psalter in his¹¹⁶ work. One well-known and prominent example is 1 Chronicles 16, where excerpts from Psalms 105, 96, and 106 (in that order) occur (Jonker 2011). However, there are also numerous ‘own’ prayers in Chronicles, that is, prayers that are either quoted directly or are mentioned indirectly but do not occur in any known *Vorlage*.

It is not only the significant number of prayers quoted or referred to in the book that attracts the attention of biblical scholars, but the contribution of those prayers to the rhetorical and theological fibre of the whole book also renders this such a prominent and important theme. In one of the most

116. The masculine singular pronoun is used throughout to refer to the Chronicler. It is unlikely that the authorship of the book of Chronicles was a singular person, and the singular pronoun should therefore also be understood as including a collective authorship. As education in writing and reading was limited to males in antiquity, it is highly unlikely that any females were included in the authorship. Therefore, the masculine form is used here, although it should not be seen as exclusive terminology.

How to cite: Jonker, LC 2023, ‘Prayer in Chronicles’, in AJ Coetsee & FP Viljoen (eds.), *Biblical Theology of prayer in the Old Testament*, Reformed Theology in Africa Series, vol. 12, AOSIS Books, Cape Town, pp. 195–213. <https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2023.BK417.12>

recent publications on the theme, prayers – particularly in Chronicles, but also in Second Temple Judaism in general – are related to the issue of identity negotiation in times of socio-political and socio-religious transformation (Gillmayr-Bucher & Häusl 2019). The editors of the last-mentioned book summarise their observations in this regard as follows (Gillmayr-Bucher & Häusl 2019):

Due to the increased presence of elaborated prayers [*in the post-exilic period*], it is reasonable to assume that prayers also participate in discourses on identity – on an individual level, but also on a collective level. Prayers play an important role for the identity of a group, as they evoke a sense of belonging to specific groups (e.g. the righteous, the pious, the poor, Israel) and add emotional significance to this affiliation. Furthermore, they confirm common values, encourage joint actions, and offer a view on the past, justifying these attitudes and perspectives. Such constructions of identity can confirm already existing concepts, or they may initiate a change. Not only can membership loyalties be revised or the meaning given to social categories be modified, but identity constructions also need to be adapted as social, political, or economical situations change or as the identity of a group is challenged by rival groups. For biblical prayers, such challenges occur especially in exilic and post-exilic times. On a national level, Israel has to reconstruct its identity without a king and a monarchy of its own. This is not, however, a uniform process; quite the contrary: competing groups try to reconstruct and solidify an Israelite identity. It is therefore not one but a ‘patchwork of concepts that make up the chequered history of ideas’. The biblical prayers collected, edited, or written during this period often show traces of such different identity constructions. (pp. 2–3)

Prayers in the literature of this ancient time should therefore not merely be considered as utterances of piety and spirituality, but rather as rhetorically and theologically powerful literary instruments that functioned in very specific socio-historical circumstances. Michael Matlock (2019) makes this point with specific reference to the book of Chronicles:

The Chr’s prayers are meant to encourage a new political, social, cultural, and religious perspective and nourish the faith of the late Persian-period Yehudite community. The prayers serve as a banner of hope for the readers of the book, who must submit to and dialogue with YHWH and learn to make essential course corrections in their behavior. (pp. 29–30)

Studying prayers in Chronicles should thus remain cognisant of the historical embeddedness of this literature without losing sight of the ultimate theological contribution that these prayers made in the late Persian period.¹¹⁷

117. Although some newer studies are reconsidering diachronic models to explain the growth of the book of Chronicles (see e.g. Hilpert 2022), the consensus is still that the book originated in the late Persian period, approximately in the middle of the 4th-century BCE. Although the book shows clear influence from Classical Greece (particularly in the format of the historiography), there are no clear traces of Hellenism in the book. It might well be that the book was finished only in the later Ptolemaic period; however, we know from archaeological evidence that the Hellenistic influence reached the highlands and Jerusalem much later than 332 BCE, when Alexander of Macedonia conquered the Levant (Jonker 2016b, ch. 3).

In the following section, a quantitative overview of the prayers in the book of Chronicles will be provided. Thereafter, in three sections, some of the most prominent prayers will be discussed in greater detail. Three categories of prayers will be the focus in those sections, namely prayers of praise (associated with King David), for deliverance (associated with King Jehoshaphat) and of penitence (associated with King Hezekiah). The qualitative study of these prayers will lead to the identification of the various rhetorical functions that prayers perform, both in the narrated worlds and narrative world.¹¹⁸ The various responses of the deity will inform these identifications. The conclusion will provide an overall assessment of the ‘theologies of prayer’ as embodied in the book of Chronicles.

■ Prayers in Chronicles

Scholars have different counts of the number of prayers in Chronicles. This is related to the distinction that is often made between ‘recorded’ and ‘reported’ prayers (Matlock 2019). Recorded prayers are those for which the full wording is provided in the Chronicles text, while reported prayers are merely the mentioning of a prayer without the wording being quoted. The different counts of prayers in Chronicles often depend on whether or not the reported prayers are also counted. Furthermore, there is a subgroup of recorded prayers that were taken over from the canonical Psalter. In some counts, this subgroup is not included. The overview below will be as comprehensive as possible.

■ An overview of the prayers

A total of 30 prayers occur in the book of Chronicles – either as recorded prayers (12×), reported prayers (16×) or recorded prayers taken over from the Psalter (2×). Table 12.1 is based on Beentjes’s count (2008, p. 10) but is expanded with a taxonomy that includes information about:

- the agent of each prayer
- whether it comes from the Chronicler’s *Sondergut* or from his *Vorlage*¹¹⁹

118. The well-known distinction of narrative criticism between ‘narrated’ and ‘narrative’ world is used here to distinguish the inner-textual functioning of the prayer (narrated) from the socio-historical functioning (narrative).

119. A distinction is typically made in Chronicles scholarship between the *Vorlage* texts in the book and the *Sondergut*. The *Vorlage* material refers to the textual material that was taken over from texts that we know from the Hebrew Bible canon. These come mainly from Samuel-Kings, but also from parts of the Pentateuch and Joshua (mainly genealogical material). The *Sondergut* is therefore textual material that is not found in any known canonical text. It may be of two types: firstly, some of the textual material might be the own creations of the Chronicler; but secondly, some *Sondergut* textual material might also be the result of further expansions and editing of the Chronicles texts.

- the genre category of the prayer
- the length of the particular prayer.

These further aspects will not only be used to make a selection of prayers to discuss in more depth in later sections of this chapter but will also assist in describing the rhetorical functions of these prayers.

■ Observations

A total of nineteen prayers belong to the Chronicler's *Sondergut*. According to the present consensus view in Chronicles studies in which the book is treated as a unity, all material not found in other biblical sources (*Sondergut*) is attributed to the Chronicler.¹²⁰ However, in some current studies in which the diachrony of the book is reconsidered, a distinction is made between (1) *Sondergut* materials that come from earlier sources to which the Chronicler had access but which were not included in the biblical canon; (2) *Sondergut* that was written by the Chronicler; and (3) *Sondergut* that resulted from later redactional activity, in a period stretching from the early Hellenistic time to the Hasmonean kingdom in the 2nd-century BCE (Kratz 2005). The *Sondergut* (recorded or reported) prayers or psalms are characteristically very short, but two prayers that stand out among the *Sondergut* – both recorded – are David's prayer in 1 Chronicles 29:10–20 (11 verses) and Jehoshaphat's prayer in 2 Chronicles 20:5–12 (8 verses).

The agents of the prayers most frequently involved are King David (7×), King Solomon (4×), King Jehoshaphat (3×) and King Hezekiah (4×). These four kings are all evaluated positively in Chronicles (Jonker 2012). The temple singers and trumpeters from the ranks of the Levitical priests are further prominent agents (5×). This distribution is in itself an important indicator that the Chronicler associated prayer with those kings and priests who play a central role in the book's rhetorical structure.

Of the genre categorisations, the 'request' predominates. Of these, six are requests for deliverance from enemies, and five of those belong to the *Sondergut* in Chronicles. The kings involved in requests for deliverance are Asa, Jehoshaphat, and Hezekiah. A total of nine prayers contain thanksgiving and praise to YHWH. There are four instances of penitence prayers. Whereas the two prayers of David's penitence are taken from the *Vorlage* in 2 Samuel 24, both the instances in Hezekiah's and Manasseh's narratives belong to

120. Although the singular is used here, it is unlikely that the book was written by only one author. The present consensus in Chronicles studies is that it could have been a collective of cultic personnel – most probably from the cultic Levites – who worked in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem toward the end of the Achaemenid-Persian period, or sometime in the early Hellenistic era. Normally, scholars work with a dating of about 350–300 BCE (or even somewhat later). Since it is almost sure that the collective who wrote the book were men, the singular masculine form will be used in pronouns referring to the authorship.

the *Sondergut*. It is noteworthy that the kings showing penitence are David and Hezekiah, but also Manasseh, who is portrayed in a much more positive light in Chronicles than in the Deuteronomistic history.

It is impossible to discuss all these prayers in detail in this essay. Therefore, a selection of three different genre categories is made, namely praise, deliverance, and penitence, and the most prominent example in each of these categories will be treated in more depth. All the selected prayers belong to the *Sondergut* in the book.

The prayers of Solomon that are the most prominent in Chronicles (nrs. 13, 14, and 15 in Table 12.1), are not chosen for further discussion. There are two reasons: firstly, the prayers are taken over (with substantial changes) from source texts in 1 Kings 8 and Psalm 132; and secondly, many studies have already been dedicated to Solomon's prayers, also in the South African context (O'Kennedy 2006).

■ David's prayer of praise (1 Chr 29:10b-20)

The Chronicler's David narrative stands in 1 Chronicles 11-29. As is clear from the length of this section in Chronicles, the David narrative forms one of the major foci in the book (Japhet 1993; Knoppers 2004). The authorship of the book made extensive, albeit very selective, use of the Deuteronomistic version in 2 Samuel and 1 Kings. However, there are also significant sections of the narrative that belong to the *Sondergut*. Most prominent of these are the additions to the Ark narrative in 1 Chronicles 13-16, as well as the account of David's organisation of the cultic personnel in Chapters 23-27. The latter passage (or parts thereof) is even considered by some scholars to be a much later insertion into the David narrative (Kratz 2005; Schmid 2012; Willi 1972, 1995; Williamson 1982). Before this extensive section on the organisation of the cultic personnel, the Chronicler provides an account of how the site for the future temple had been identified (1 Chr 21:28-22:1) and how King David prepared for building the temple in Jerusalem. It is indicated that David would not build the temple but that his son, Solomon, would complete the project.

After all the preparations, the David narrative develops to a climax in Chapter 29. The whole chapter consists of *Sondergut* - in this case, most probably from the Chronicler's own hand. David addresses the whole assembly (1 Chr 29:1-5), calling upon them to pledge their support for the temple-building project. Thereafter follows a description of the very positive response from the people (1 Chr 29:6-9). The next pericope (1 Chr 29:10-19) contains David's prayer to YHWH, whereafter his command to the congregation to bless YHWH concludes the section (1 Chr 29:20). The second-last pericope of the chapter (1 Chr 29:21-25) reports what seems to be the climax of the whole David narrative, namely, the enthronement of

TABLE 12.1: The author's adaption of the count of Beentjes, but with own expansions.

No.	Text ref. ^a	Agent of prayer	Category	Source	Genre category	Verse(s)
1.	1 Chr 4:10	Jabez	Recorded	<i>Sondergut</i>	Request (for blessing and support)	1
2.	1 Chr 5:20	Reuben, Gad and half Manasseh	Reported	<i>Sondergut</i>	Request (for deliverance from the enemy)	1
3.	1 Chr 14:10	David	Recorded	2 Sam 5:19	Request (for advice)	1
4.	1 Chr 16:8–36	David	Recorded	Ps 96, 105–106	Thanksgiving	25
5.	1 Chr 16:41	Heman, Jeduthun and other Levite singers	Reported	<i>Sondergut</i>	Thanksgiving	1
6.	1 Chr 17:16–27	David	Recorded	2 Sam 7:18–29	Dedication Request (for blessing and support)	12
7.	1 Chr 21:8	David	Recorded	2 Sam 24:10	Penitence	1
8.	1 Chr 21:17	David	Recorded	2 Sam 24:17	Penitence	1
9.	1 Chr 21:26	David	Reported	2 Sam 24:25	Request (for well-being)	1
10.	1 Chr 29:10–20	David	Recorded	<i>Sondergut</i>	Praise	11
11.	2 Chr 1:8–10	Solomon	Recorded	1 Ki 3:6–9	Request (for wisdom)	3
12.	2 Chr 5:13	Trumpeters and singers	Reported	<i>Sondergut</i>	Praise Thanksgiving	1
13.	2 Chr 6:3–11	Solomon	Recorded	1 Ki 8:14–21	Dedication	9
14.	2 Chr 6:14–40	Solomon	Recorded	1 Ki 8:22–53	Dedication Request (for forgiveness)	27
15.	2 Chr 6:41–42	Solomon	Recorded	Ps 132:8–10	Request (for the presence of YHWH)	2
16.	2 Chr 7:3	All the people of Israel	Reported	<i>Sondergut</i>	Praise Confession	1
17.	2 Chr 7:6	Priests and Levites	Reported	<i>Sondergut</i>	Praise Confession	1
18.	2 Chr 12:6	The officers and king Rehoboam	Reported	<i>Sondergut</i>	Acknowledgement	1
19.	2 Chr 13:14	Judahites	Reported	<i>Sondergut</i>	Request (for deliverance from the enemy)	1
20.	2 Chr 14:11	Asa	Recorded	<i>Sondergut</i>	Request (for deliverance from the enemy)	1
21.	2 Chr 18:31	Jehoshaphat	Reported	1 Ki 22:32	Request (for deliverance from the enemy)	1
22.	2 Chr 20:6–12	Jehoshaphat	Recorded	<i>Sondergut</i>	Request (for deliverance from the enemy)	7
23.	2 Chr 20:21	Singers appointed by Jehoshaphat	Reported	<i>Sondergut</i>	Thanksgiving	1
24.	2 Chr 20:26	Jehoshaphat and his people	Reported	<i>Sondergut</i>	Praise	1

(Table 12.1 continues on the next page)

TABLE 12.1 (cont...): The author's adaption of the count of Beentjes, but with own expansions.

No.	Text ref. ^a	Agent of prayer	Category	Source	Genre category	Verse(s)
25.	2 Chr 30:18b-19	Hezekiah	Recorded	<i>Sondergut</i>	Penitence Request	2
26.	2 Chr 30:27	Priests and Levites	Reported	<i>Sondergut</i>	Praise	1
27.	2 Chr 31:8	Hezekiah and his officers	Reported	<i>Sondergut</i>	Praise	1
28.	2 Chr 32:20	Hezekiah and Isaiah the prophet	Reported	<i>Sondergut</i>	Request (for deliverance from the enemy)	1
29.	2 Chr 32:24	Hezekiah	Reported	<i>Sondergut</i>	Request (for healing)	1
30.	2 Chr 33:12-13	Manasseh	Reported	<i>Sondergut</i>	Penitence	2

Source: Author's own work.

Key: ref., reference.

^aThe book Chronicles is one book in the Hebrew Bible. However, because of the division that was made in the Septuagint, the numbering of the chapters has been divided into 1 Chronicles and 2 Chronicles, and some later Hebrew versions have also adopted this division.

Solomon as the successor of his father, David, as king over Israel. The last verses (1 Chr 29:26–30) contain the death notice for David.

David's remarkable prayer in 1 Chronicles 29:10–20 is clearly set in a liturgical context, with the king addressing the whole assembly. David opens the prayer by 'blessing' YHWH before the eyes of the assembly. The verb בָּרַךְ used in Verse 10a (in the *pi'e'l*) is traditionally translated with 'bless', but in the *pi'e'l* it can have the semantic potential of 'to declare God to be the source of special power' or 'to praise God' (Koehler & Baumgartner 2001, p. 160), or to 'speak words invoking divine favor, with the intent that the object will have favourable circumstances or state at a future time', with the further connotation of 'praise, extol, thank for greatness or goodness, i.e. speak words of the excellence of an object' (Swanson 1997, §1385). In the conclusion, in Verse 20, the same configuration of terminology is used, with David calling upon the assembly to bless 'YHWH your God' and with the assembly responding immediately by doing so. The blessing or praising of YHWH, their God, frames the prayer.

Verses 11–13 contain the enactment of the call, namely, to recite various praises of God's greatness, his honour, his riches, and his power and might over everything that is in the heavens and on the earth. The praises culminate in Verse 13, where two further terms of praise – Hiphil of יָדָה and *pi'e'l* of הִלֵּל – are used in the participial form, indicating continuous action. David's prayer thus has the performative function of praising YHWH and encouraging the assembly to do the same, not only during the liturgical ceremony but also in future.

With the introduction, 'Who am I and who are my people [...]' (v. 14), David expresses their humbleness and insignificance in the project of temple-building. He acknowledges that everything that he and his people have donated willingly for the construction of the temple comes from YHWH, who is the provider of everything. David's prayer in Verses 14–17 therefore praises God for giving him and his people the opportunity to contribute to the building project with their generous freewill offerings.

With the second invocation of God's name in 1 Chronicles 29:18, David presents a petition. He asks that the people will have the desire to be generous in their hearts and will keep their hearts loyal to God. He also asks for wholehearted devotion for his son Solomon '[...] to keep YHWH'S commands, requirements and decrees' (v. 19), and that his son will have the 'devotion' to build the temple.¹²¹ David's recorded prayer ends here.

121. The word used here, הַבְּיָרָה, can also be translated as 'fortress' or 'citadel' (Koehler & Baumgartner 2001, pp. 123–124). Many translations regard it as a reference to the future temple, while some scholars instead relate it to the royal palace that Solomon would build. Within the present context, where the main topic is the temple building project, it is more likely that it should be associated with the temple (see the same term in v. 1 as well). However, the use of הַבְּיָרָה remains conspicuous here, mainly because the two occurrences of the term in Verses 1 and 19 are the only ones in the Hebrew Bible that are related to temple building.

David's call to the assembly in 1 Chronicles 29:20 to praise [ברך] YHWH their God is heard favourably by the people and they immediately start praising [ברך] YHWH the God of their ancestors. They do so with the typical gesture of reverence and respect for the deity: they bowed low and prostrated themselves before YHWH and the king. It is strange that 'the king' is also included here. The suggestion is probably, just as earlier in the Chronicler's narrative, that the king is the custodian of YHWH'S kingship and prostration before the king implies reverence for YHWH.

The prayer sets the theological context within which Solomon's reign was supposed to start. God is addressed in the prayer with the expressions 'O YHWH, God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting' (1 Chr 29:10) and 'O YHWH, God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Israel' (1 Chr 29:18). The focus is clearly on YHWH the covenant God of their ancestors. In this way, the prayer establishes continuity with the religious traditions of the past.

To establish the rhetorical function of this prayer of praise, one has to keep in mind that the Chronicler's text was written most probably in the late Persian or early Hellenistic period. This was the time of the rebuilt temple. It was also the time when the Jerusalem temple most likely had an in-between economic function. On the one hand, the temple officials had to extract resources from the people of the land for their own subsistence. On the other hand, however, the temple also functioned as colonial connection to the imperial centre for tax and tribute purposes (Jonker 2016a). The Chronicler's inclusion of this prayer of praise in the context of the David narrative certainly had the function of reminding all the inhabitants of the Persian province Yehud of the generosity that they are supposed to have towards the temple. More importantly, however, the prayer also had the function of situating the people of Jerusalem and Yehud in the religious landscape of the time. While being only one among many religious groupings in the Levant and wider Persian Empire, the Yahwists in Jerusalem found their identity in the fact that the temple was a physical symbol of the covenant loyalty of their God, not only from the time of David, but already from the time of their ancestors. Hearing a prayer of praise in the Chronicler's David narrative would also encourage the late Persian-period temple community in Jerusalem to praise YHWH and to remain faithful to his commandments and statutes.

■ Jehoshaphat's prayer for deliverance (2 Chr 20:6-12)

Contained in 2 Chronicles 17-20 is the Chronicler's narrative about King Jehoshaphat of Judah. Remarkably, three of these four chapters belong to the *Sondergut* in the book. Since Jehoshaphat's narrative is one of the royal

accounts in which some of the Chronicler's characteristic views are revealed (Jonker 2013b), one may assume that the *Sondergut* stems from the Chronicler's hand.

The major part of 2 Chronicles 20 recounts Jehoshaphat's defeat of the coalition of the Ammonites and Moabites (2 Chr 20:1-30). The first section (2 Chr 20:1-4) describes the military threat, the king's fear and the assembly of Judah in Jerusalem to 'seek' YHWH. Then follows the prayer of Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 20:5-12) and a description of Jehaziel the Levite prophesying amidst 'all Judah' (after the *רוח יהוה* had come upon him) that God will lead them to victory the next day (2 Chr 20:13-17). The response of the king of all Judah, of all inhabitants of Jerusalem and of the Levites to the prophecy is described next (2 Chr 20:18-19). The account of the battle follows (2 Chr 20:20-26), whereafter it is indicated that the king and his military force returned to Jerusalem (2 Chr 20:27-30).

The king stands in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, like David did when he prayed his famous prayer (see previous section). This time, however, the assembly is gathered 'in the house of YHWH' (2 Chr 20:5). What they came to do, was - as Verse 4 indicates - to 'seek' YHWH. The 'seeking' of YHWH plays an important role in Jehoshaphat's prayer, as well as in the whole book. Those kings who sought (mostly with *דרש* but also with *בקש*) YHWH enjoyed rest, health and prosperity (Jonker 2013a; Klein 2012; McKenzie 2004), while those who did not seek or rely [*שען*] on YHWH lost their battles, their prosperity or even their health.¹²²

The recorded prayer of Jehoshaphat follows (2 Chr 20:6-12) after the narrative introduction in 2 Chronicles 20:5. The king introduces his call to God with the invocation, 'O YHWH, God of our fathers, are you not God in Heaven?' These words open a whole series of confessions about who YHWH is (2 Chr 20:6-9): YHWH rules over all nations; YHWH has power and might; YHWH drove the inhabitants out of the land so that the descendants of Abraham his friend could live there; and YHWH will hear and save in times of affliction. These confessions offer motivations for why the king prays to YHWH in a time of distress when the enemy is heading in their direction.

In 2 Chronicles 20:10 the king's prayer turns (indicated by *ועתה*) to the petition. The petition takes an argumentative tone: he reminds YHWH that YHWH did not allow the descendants of Abraham, who had settled in the promised land, to drive out the Ammonites, Moabites and those from Mount Seir. It is as if King Jehoshaphat lodges an accusation against YHWH. From this fact of the past (with the logical link created in v. 11 by *והנה*), the

122. The narrative about King Asa in 2 Chronicles 14-16 is a prime example of how these terms are used to structure the narrative (Jonker 2006).

king denounces YHWH that these very same peoples were now on their way to attack Judah and to take their land possession.

With this elaborate build-up, the prayer reaches its climax in Verse 12, where the king asks for deliverance from the enemy. Jehoshaphat now calls upon God to judge [שפוט] their enemies. The term used here is a clever play on the name of the king, Jehoshaphat, which means 'YHWH judges'. Furthermore, although it was indicated in an earlier episode that the king had a very big army at his disposal (2 Chr 17:13b-19), Jehoshaphat now declares in prayer that 'we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do [...]'. He therefore declares, 'our eyes are on you' (2 Chr 20:12). This attitude differs greatly from that of an earlier section when Jehoshaphat used his own discretion to enter an alliance with Ahab to fight against Ramoth Gilead.

Within the narrated world, the prayer of deliverance makes good sense in light of the description of the military threat. Rhetorically, it is quite interesting that the prayer takes an argumentative tone in which the king even accuses YHWH of being complicit in the present situation. This emphasises the urgency of the call on YHWH.

However, within the socio-historic situation of the late Persian period (Jonker 2018a), the Chronicler's presentation of Jehoshaphat's prayer has a further function. We know that in this period there was immense military activity in the region of the Levant because of the fact that Persia lost its control over Egypt, and that the southern border of the empire suddenly moved much closer to the province of Yehud. It might even be that some rumours about Alexander's military campaigns toward the east had reached Jerusalem. Within this context, the Chronicler's inclusion of Jehoshaphat's prayer and YHWH'S response to it must have been a great comfort for the people of Yehud. They were indeed powerless against the hordes of military forces that were heading their way. The Chronicler's citation of the prayer would have been a strong admonition, directed towards the people of Yehud, to 'seek' YHWH in their distress. Jehoshaphat's prayer for deliverance could in this way also become the prayer for deliverance of the Yehudite community and Jerusalem. The boldness of the king, reflected in the prayer, is built upon the confessions about YHWH's power and might. In this way, the community in Yehud is reminded that YHWH, their God, is reliable, even in their circumstances that were totally different than Jehoshaphat's.

■ Hezekiah's prayer of penitence (2 Chr 30:18b-19)

The account about King Hezekiah of Judah is one of the most prominent in the Chronicler's overall rhetorical construction in the book. This king is not

only portrayed similarly to David and Solomon, but the narrative also prepares the way towards Josiah's kingship (Jonker 2002, 2003), where the involvement of the Levites in the Passover celebrations culminates (Jonker 2020c).

The short prayer stands in the subsection 2 Chronicles 30:1–27 (the Chronicler's own material in full), which is dedicated to the preparations for and celebration of the Passover. Passover occupies a very prominent place, not only in the Hezekiah narrative but also in the Josiah account. However, it is here in the account of Hezekiah's reign that the Passover is mentioned for the first time in Chronicles. The Chronicler's account of Hezekiah's Passover constantly reminds the reader that this important cultic festival was not celebrated correctly. There were not enough priests available during the first occasion who had consecrated themselves. That is the reason why the Passover was only celebrated on the fourteenth day of the second month instead of on the prescribed fourteenth day of the first month. But, also, on the second occasion, there were many of the assembly who did not consecrate themselves.

In 2 Chronicles 30:16, it is stated that the priests and the Levites took up their positions as prescribed in the Law of Moses. Verses 17–18a reveal that many in the assembly, from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun, ate the Passover lamb without consecrating themselves beforehand. Hezekiah's prayer (2 Chr 30:18b–19) follows within this context. He prays to YHWH to pardon everyone who sets his heart on seeking [דַּרְשׁ] God – even if they were not ritually clean according to the rules of the sanctuary. It is then stated that YHWH heard Hezekiah and healed the people (2 Chr 30:20). It is unexpected that YHWH grants the king his wish, even though the people had gone against the rules of the sanctuary.

As mentioned above, the theme of Passover contributes significantly to building up the tensions and expectations in the narrative world. The celebration of Passover on the concession date (fourteenth day of the second month) during the time of Hezekiah prepares the way for celebrating the Passover on the right date (fourteenth day of the first month) and with all duly consecrated. The strange remark in 2 Chronicles 35:20 (ESV, adapted), 'After all this, when Josiah had established [בָּנוּ] the temple [...]', leaves the impression that – only after the right celebration of Passover – the temple-building project that had started with David and continued through the reign of his son Solomon came to its fulfilment. The preparation for temple-building (David) and Passover celebration (Hezekiah) comes to fruition with the construction of the temple (Solomon) and the right celebration of Passover (Josiah) (Jonker 2002). Through the parallel developments of the temple-building and Passover celebration themes, the Levites grow in prominence in the Chronicler's overall narrative (Jonker 2020b, 2020c). The rhetorical intention in the macro-structure of the narrated world is thus fairly clear.

How these themes and texts and, specifically, the account of Hezekiah's Passover functioned in the narrative world of the late Persian or early Hellenistic contexts is more complex. The prayer of penitence in 2 Chronicles 30:18b–19 is spoken by the king on behalf of his people, who did not consecrate themselves. During the time when this narrative was written and read, there were no kings of Israel and Judah – there was only the Persian king. However, the Persian kings – starting with Cyrus (2 Chr 36:22–23) – allowed the Yehudites to rebuild their temple in Jerusalem and practice their religion. The cultic community in Jerusalem and Yehud therefore did not function in a 'normal' way, like in the time of the Judahite monarchy. Furthermore, we know that in the late Persian context, Yahwism was also practised in diaspora communities (Babylon and Elephantine) and on Mount Gerizim near Samaria, which belonged to the former northern kingdom. It thus seems that Hezekiah's prayer of penitence functions on a micro-level as supplication on behalf of the Yahwistic community within a context where non-conventional forms of cultic activity were prevalent. On the one hand, the prayer and the literary context within which it is set in Chronicles admit the non-conventionality of their religious situation while simultaneously offering comfort that YHWH 'healed the people' in their ancient king's time. The penitence expressed here is thus closely connected to the socio-religious context of the narrative world.

■ Rhetorical functions of prayers in Chronicles

After studying three prayers in depth in the previous sections, we now move towards the identification of the rhetorical and theological functions of all the other prayers in Chronicles. Because of space constraints, this analysis cannot be conducted in the same detail as in the earlier examples. The tabular format in Table 12.2 should therefore suffice.

Two important aspects that this study wants to highlight are illustrated clearly in Table 12.2: (1) When trying to identify the theological contributions of the prayers in Chronicles, one should distinguish between the functioning of the prayers in the narrated contexts of the book and the rhetorical functioning of the Chronicles literature during the time(s) of origin of the book. (2) It is impossible to identify one unified 'theology of prayer of the book Chronicles', and one should rather be looking for 'theologies of prayer in the book Chronicles'.¹²³ These aspects will be synthesised in the conclusion.

123. I hereby refer to the distinction that Erhard Gerstenberger has brought into the study of 'a theology of the Old Testament' (Gerstenberger 2001). He shows the impossibility of identifying such a unified theology that can synthesise all theological expressions of the Old Testament and shows how the variety of 'theologies in the Old Testament' can be related to the socio-historical circumstances that produced them, and how those can enrich us even further in our theological reflection on the Old Testament. Acknowledging the variety of 'theologies of prayer in the book Chronicles' thus also stands central in the present contribution.

TABLE 12.2: Identification of the rhetorical and theological functions of all the other prayers in Chronicles.

No.	Text. ref.	Genre category	Narrated world	Response of deity in narrated world	Narrative world
1.	1 Chr 4:10	Request (for blessing and support)	Narrative insertion in genealogy to emphasise the vulnerable existence of Judahites	God granted the request	Social identity negotiation in the post-exilic context of a new religious and economic beginning in the Persian era
2.	1 Chr 5:20	Request (for deliverance from the enemy)	Narrative insertion in genealogy to emphasise holy war	God granted the request	Encouragement to rely on God in times of military threat
3.	1 Chr 14:10	Request (for advice)	David's request shows his pious reliance on God	YHWH responds with the promise of military assistance	Encouragement to rely on God in times of military threat
4.	1 Chr 16:8–36	Thanksgiving	David's praying of cultic psalms shows his piety; confirmation that the Ark in Jerusalem symbolises YHWH's presence	No response mentioned	Encouragement to support the restored cult in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem during the Persian period
5.	1 Chr 16:41	Thanksgiving	Levite families reported rendering thanks to YHWH in a cultic formula	No response mentioned	Emphasising the prominence of the Levite families in the restored cult
6.	1 Chr 17:16–27	Dedication and request (for blessing and support)	David's humble dedication and request show his pious reliance on YHWH	YHWH granted the request (in the macro-structure of David's narrative)	Rendering the restored cult in Jerusalem a continuation of YHWH's election of David's line
7.	1 Chr 21:8	Penitence	David confesses that the census he commissioned was a sin against YHWH	YHWH gives David a choice of three punishments; YHWH sends pestilence through an angel to destroy multitudes	A warning not to rely on military strength in the restored community but rather on the grace of YHWH
8.	1 Chr 21:17	Penitence	David confesses that YHWH ought to punish him and not the people for the census; David takes responsibility	YHWH commands David to erect an altar on Ornan's threshing floor	The site of the restored temple is on neutral ground between the areas of Benjamin and Judah; the site was miraculously identified
9.	1 Chr 21:26	Request (for well-being)	David calls on YHWH at the newly built altar	YHWH responds with fire on the altar	Encouragement to acknowledge the Jerusalem cultic site as YHWH's chosen place
10.	1 Chr 29:10–20	Praise (see the section titled 'David's prayer of praise [1 Chr 29:10b–20]')	Confirming that YHWH was the covenant God of Israel; establishing continuity with religious traditions during the ancestral period	No response reported	Encouragement to donate with generosity to the restored temple in Jerusalem; establishing continuity with religious traditions from the time of David and Solomon
11.	2 Chr 1:8–10	Request (for wisdom)	Solomon continues the tradition of piety that started with David through wisdom	God granted him wisdom	Dedication to the restored Jerusalem cult brings wisdom to leadership

(Table 12.2 continues on the next page)

TABLE 12.2 (cont...): Identification of the rhetorical and theological functions of all the other prayers in Chronicles.

No.	Text. ref.	Genre category	Narrated world	Response of deity in narrated world	Narrative world
12.	2 Chr 5:13	Praise and thanksgiving	Levite musicians play a central role in cultic service in the temple of Jerusalem	The glory of YHWH filled the temple of God with a cloud	Emphasising the critical role of the Levites in the restored cult
13.	2 Chr 6:3-11	Dedication	Solomon confirms that his dedication goes back to YHWH's loyalty to the covenant with his father, David	No response reported	The restored temple in Jerusalem receives permanence from YHWH's covenant loyalty
14.	2 Chr 6:14-40	Dedication and request (for forgiveness)	Solomon proclaims that the temple is the basis for Israel's continued relationship with YHWH in all circumstances	<i>(continuation in the next prayer)</i>	Encouraging restored community leaders to dedicate themselves to YHWH and to expect forgiveness from YHWH
15.	2 Chr 6:41-42	Request (for the presence of YHWH)	Solomon's quoting of cultic psalms embeds him in the tradition of the past; Solomon's invitation of YHWH into the newly built sanctuary	Fire came from Heaven that devoured the offerings, and the glory of YHWH filled the temple	Encouraging the restored community to see the rebuilt temple as YHWH's abode among them
16.	2 Chr 7:3	Praise and confession	The people's response through a cultic formula of praise and confession shows their wholehearted support for the temple	No response reported	Encouraging the restored community to confess their faith in YHWH and to pledge their support for a rebuilt temple
17.	2 Chr 7:6	Praise and confession	The priests' and Levites' response through a cultic formula of praise and confession shows their wholehearted support for the temple	No response reported	Encouraging the restored community to acknowledge the priests' and Levites' role in the restored cult
18.	2 Chr 12:6	Acknowledgement	Rehoboam and his officers acknowledge that YHWH is in the right – they should rely on Him in their battle against Shishak of Egypt	YHWH saw their humbling act and therefore granted them deliverance	'To rely on' YHWH in times of military threat brings deliverance
19.	2 Chr 13:14	Request (for deliverance from the enemy)	Judah relies on YHWH in the military threat by Jeroboam from the kingdom of Israel	God defeated Jeroboam and Israel	The province Yehud (in the south) can rely on YHWH's assistance in any rivalry with the (more successful) province of Samaria (in the north) – inter-provincial polemic in service of self-categorisation in Yehud

(Table 12.2 continues on the next page)

TABLE 12.2 (cont...): Identification of the rhetorical and theological functions of all the other prayers in Chronicles.

No.	Text. ref.	Genre category	Narrated world	Response of deity in narrated world	Narrative world
20.	2 Chr 14:11	Request (for deliverance from the enemy)	Asa relies on YHWH to grant deliverance from the mighty Cushite onslaught; YHWH fights the holy war for Judah	YHWH granted victory over the Cushites	YHWH as the mighty warrior is protecting the restored community in Yehud, even against the Cushites, who had the reputation that the Persians could not conquer them
21.	2 Chr 18:31	Request (for deliverance from the enemy)	Jehoshaphat's cry to YHWH while in military threat shows his reliance on the deity	YHWH helped Jehoshaphat	'To rely on' YHWH in times of military threat brings deliverance
22.	2 Chr 20:6-12	Request (for deliverance from the enemy; see section titled 'Jehoshaphat's prayer for deliverance [2 Chr 20:6-12]')	Jehoshaphat lodges an urgent call to YHWH to deliver Judah from their enemies	YHWH conquered the enemy on behalf of Judah	'To rely on' YHWH in times of military threat brings deliverance
23	2 Chr 20:21	Thanksgiving	The singers appointed by Jehoshaphat use a cultic formula for giving credit to YHWH for their deliverance; the military role of YHWH and cultic dedication are thus closely related	YHWH set an ambush for Judah's enemies	Cultic dedication in the restored temple in Jerusalem brings military protection
24.	2 Chr 20:26	Praise	Jehoshaphat and his people praise ('bless') YHWH for giving them victory, acknowledging that the deity fought the holy war for them	No response reported	Leaders of the restored community should lead the people of Yehud in their praise for YHWH, who delivered them from their exilic condition
25.	2 Chr 30:18b-19	Penitence and request (see section titled 'Hezekiah's prayer of penitence [2 Chr 30:18b-19]')	Hezekiah's prayer calls upon YHWH to pardon those who did not consecrate themselves for the Passover celebrations because of them setting their hearts upon seeking YHWH	YHWH heard Hezekiah and granted his request	YHWH should be sought in the restored cultic community where conventional worship was not always possible
26.	2 Chr 30:27	Praise	Priests and Levites play a pivotal role in encouraging the people of Israel to let their voices be heard in praise to YHWH, who allowed them to celebrate the Passover	No response reported	Emphasising the importance of the cultic personnel in leading the people in praise of YHWH

(Table 12.2 continues on the next page)

TABLE 12.2 (cont...): Identification of the rhetorical and theological functions of all the other prayers in Chronicles.

No.	Text. ref.	Genre category	Narrated world	Response of deity in narrated world	Narrative world
27.	2 Chr 31:8	Praise	Hezekiah and his officials praise YHWH and the people for bringing tithes to the temple	No response reported	Urging the restored community in Jerusalem to bring their tithes to the rebuilt temple as service to YHWH
28.	2 Chr 32:20	Request (for deliverance from the enemy)	Hezekiah and Isaiah cry to YHWH to deliver them from the Assyrian threat, illustrating reliance on YHWH	YHWH sent an angel to deliver Judah and Jerusalem from the Assyrian threat	'To rely on' YHWH in times of military threat brings deliverance
29.	2 Chr 32:24	Request (for healing)	Hezekiah relies on YHWH for healing from his illness, illustrating his personal piety	YHWH answered Hezekiah and gave him a sign	Urging the leaders of the restored community to personal piety of relying on YHWH
30.	2 Chr 33:12-13	Penitence	Even Manasseh, as the big historical culprit, realises that he should ask penitence from YHWH, thus showing personal piety	God heard his plea and restored him to Jerusalem and his kingdom	Urging leaders of the restored community to show personal piety and reliance on YHWH

Source: Author's own work.

Key: ref., reference.

■ Conclusion

In practising an analogical hermeneutic (Jonker 2018b, 2020a), it is necessary to establish the rhetorical functioning of biblical texts in their contexts of origin before attempting to interpret those texts in contemporary contexts. In this way, one avoids taking the narrated worlds in the texts as primary – and exclusive – points of departure (Jonker 2013c). The rhetorical functioning of these texts in the narrative worlds within which they were composed and edited should rather be our point of departure in our endeavours to extract theological value from the texts for our own time. In this contribution, I have therefore emphasised that the ‘memories of the past’ (Ben Zvi 2011, 2014), as embodied in the text of Chronicles, contributed to the theo-political discourses during the late Persian/early Hellenistic period in the province of Yehud. It therefore remains our task in this conclusion to summarise how Chronicles participated in those discourses and which theological confessions underlie the book’s contributions.

First and foremost among the conclusions is the observation that ‘past prayers shaped the contemporary socio-religious identity’ of the restoration community in Jerusalem in the late Persian/early Hellenistic period (Gillmayr-Bucher & Häusl 2019; Kim 2021). The Chronicler’s retelling of the Davidic-Solomonic Israel’s and Judah’s histories puts special emphasis on the prayers of various prominent kings, of their cultic officials and of the whole community. In this way, the restoration community in the province of Yehud (including the diaspora communities) is encouraged to re-enact this identity in their own Second Temple reality. The community leadership is thereby encouraged to rely on YHWH for deliverance from military threats and the well-being of the community in general. They are also encouraged to practice personal piety, through which they could gain access to YHWH’s favour. The cultic personnel should realise their pivotal function in cultic activities and in leading the people in worship of YHWH. The community as a whole should also realise that their core identity is not constituted by ethnic or political realities but by them being the covenant people of YHWH. Their identity negotiation in the 5th- and 4th-century BCE in concrete socio-political and socio-religious conditions was prominently characterised by their understanding of themselves as the continuation of the covenant community of a bygone era in Israel’s history.

Flowing from this, the Chronicler’s presentation of the variety of prayers emphasises that prayer was an integral part of Judah’s and Israel’s religious existence in the past, whether through formal cultic prayers or through spontaneous calls to YHWH in times of distress. YHWH or God is therefore the exclusive addressee of all prayers – recorded and reported – in Chronicles. This constitutes the basic theological confession that the faith community during the restoration period found the basis of their existence

in YHWH, the covenant God. Through their prayers – cultic or personal, taken over from historical sources or constructed anew as *Sondergut* – they confessed their faith in this God.

A further point to note is that prayer was the mode through which the Chronicler related political leadership and the cult with one another. By indicating that many of the good kings of the past prayed to YHWH in thanksgiving, praise, penitence or request, the Chronicler confessed that all earthly powers were under YHWH's authority and that their relationship was mediated through the cult and the temple.

The discussed point leads to the identification of the focus on the place of worship in the Chronicler's theological vision. The temple is an institution established by YHWH. The temple therefore embodies YHWH's presence among his people. Their prayers therefore depend on the confession that YHWH does indeed dwell among them, despite the challenges – and even military threats – of the post-exilic era. The Exile did not obliterate the deity. YHWH is present in their midst.

The narrative world(s) of Chronicles reflects a diversity of theological perspectives, as indicated in Table 12.2. These perspectives cast valuable light on the rich understanding of the role and place of prayer in the late Persian and early Hellenistic periods. These identifications reflect the hermeneutic through which the Chronicler interpreted the traditions of the past. The Chronicler's contextual re-interpretations of these traditions serve as avenues along which our contemporary, contextual, and religious-theological reflections can gain depth as well.

References

Introduction

- Balentine, SE 1993, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The drama of divine-human dialogue*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Camp, PG & Longman, T, III (eds.) 2015, *Praying with ancient Israel: Exploring the theology of prayer in the Old Testament*, Abilene Christian University Press, Abilene.
- Coetsee, AJ & Viljoen, FP 2021, 'A Biblical Theology of life: An introduction', in AJ Coetsee & FP Viljoen (eds.), *Biblical Theology of life in the Old Testament*, Reformed Theology in Africa Series, vol. 5, AOSIS Books, Cape Town, pp. 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2021.BK281.01>
- Crump, D 2006, *Knocking on Heaven's door: A New Testament theology of petitionary prayer*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids.
- Kim, BD 2015, 'Prayer in Ruth and Esther', in PG Camp & T Longman, III (eds.), *Praying with ancient Israel: Exploring the theology of prayer in the Old Testament*, Abilene Christian University Press, Abilene, pp. 117-134.
- Longenecker, RN (ed.) 2002, *Into God's presence: Prayer in the New Testament*, McMaser New Testament studies, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.
- Millar, JG 2016, *Calling on the name of the Lord: A Biblical Theology of prayer*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 38, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove.
- Miller, PD 1994, *They cried to the Lord: The form and theology of Biblical prayer*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Peterson, DG 1992, *Engaging with God: A Biblical theology of worship*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove.
- Phillips, EA 2015, 'Prayer in the wisdom literature', in PG Camp & T Longman, III (eds.), *Praying with ancient Israel: Exploring the theology of prayer in the Old Testament*, Abilene Christian University Press, Abilene, pp. 101-116.
- Reformed Churches in South Africa n.d., *The Belgic Confession*, viewed 22 February 2023, <<http://gksa.org.za/pdf/Eng%20documents/belgic%20confession.pdf>>

Chapter 1

- Alexander, TD 2016, *Exodus*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids.
- Beale, GK 1999, *The Book of revelation: A commentary on the Greek text*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.
- Beale, GK 2004, *The temple and the church's mission: A Biblical Theology of the dwelling place of God*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove.
- Boda, MJ 2009, *A severe mercy: Sin and its remedy in the Old Testament*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake.
- Brown, F, Driver, S & Briggs, C 1906, *The Brown-driver-Briggs Hebrew and English lexicon*, Hendrickson, Peabody.
- Chapell, B 2005, *Praying backwards*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids.
- Childs, BS 1972, *The Book of Exodus: A critical, theological commentary*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville.
- Christensen, D 2001, *Deuteronomy 1-21:9*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids.
- Clowney, E 1988, 'Prayer, theology of', in SB Ferguson, DF Wright & JI Packer (eds.), *New dictionary of theology*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, pp. 526-527.

- Collins, CJ 2018, *Reading Genesis well: Navigating history, poetry, science, and truth in Genesis 1-11*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids.
- Currid, JD 2016, 'Exodus', in M van Pelt (ed.), *A Biblical-Theological introduction to the Old Testament: The gospel promised*, Crossway, Wheaton.
- Enns, P 2000, *The NIV application commentary: Exodus*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids.
- Fretheim, TE 2010, *Exodus*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville.
- Gane, R 2004, *The NIV application commentary: Leviticus, Numbers*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids.
- Hamilton, V 1980, 'פלל', in RL Harris, GL Archer, Jr & B Waltke (eds.), *Theological wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, Moody Press, Chicago, pp. 725-726.
- Hybels, B 1988, *Too busy not to pray*, L Neff (ed.), InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove.
- Koehler, L, Baumgartner, W & Stamm, J 1967-1995, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexicon zum Alten Testament*, Brill, Leiden.
- Lioy, DT 2010, 'The Garden of Eden as a primordial temple or sacred space for humankind', *Conspectus*, vol. 10, pp. 25-57.
- McComisky, TE 1980, 'זכר', in RL Harris, LA Gleason & BK Waltke (eds.), *Theological wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, Moody, Chicago, pp. 241-243.
- Miller, P 2009, *A praying life: Connecting with God in a distracting world*, NavPress, Colorado Springs.
- Missouri Presbytery Study Committee on Federal Vision Theology 2006, *Report of the Missouri Presbytery ad hoc Committee on Federal Vision Theology*, Missouri Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America, St. Louis.
- Noth, M 1968, *Numbers: A commentary*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville.
- Ryken, L, Wilhoit, J & Longman, T, III (eds.) 1998, *Dictionary of biblical imagery*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove.
- Speiser, EA 1963, 'The stem PLL in Hebrew', *The Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 82, pp. 301-306. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3264632>
- Stuart, DK 2006, *The Book of Exodus*, Broadman & Holman, Nashville.
- Thompson, J 1982, 'Prayer', in JD Douglas, FF Bruce, JI Packer, N Hillyer, D Guthrie, AR Millard & DJ Wiseman (eds.), *New Bible dictionary*, 2nd edn., InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, pp. 958-961.
- Verhoef, PA 1997, 'Prayer', in WA VanGemeren (ed.), *New international dictionary of Old Testament theology & exegesis*, vol. 4, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, pp. 1057-1063.
- Wenham, GJ 1981, *Numbers: An introduction and commentary*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove.
- Wright, C 1996, *Deuteronomy*, Hendrickson, Peabody.

Chapter 2

- Avioz, M 2005, *Nathan's Oracle (2 Samuel 7) and its interpreters*, Peter Lang, Bern.
- Bailey, RC 1995, 'The redemption of Yahweh: A literary critical function of the songs of Hannah and David', *BibInt*, vol. 3, pp. 213-231. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156851595X00294>
- Becker-Spörl, S 1992, 'Und Hanna betete, und sie sprach ...', in *Literarische Untersuchungen zu 1 Sam 1*, Francke, Tübingen.
- Boda, MJ 2009, *A severe mercy: Sin and its remedy in the Old Testament*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake.
- Brueggemann, W 1985, *David's truth in Israel's imagination & memory*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia.
- Brueggemann, W 1990, '1 Samuel: A sense of beginning', *ZAW*, vol. 102, pp. 33-48. <https://doi.org/10.1515/zatw.1990.102.1.33>

- Cogan, M 2001, *1 Kings: A new translation with introduction and commentary*, Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Davies, JA 2012, 'Heptadic verbal patterns in the Solomon narrative of 1 Kings 1-11', *TynBull*, vol. 63, pp. 21-34. <https://doi.org/10.53751/001c.29323>
- DeVries, SJ 2003, *1 Kings*, 2nd edn., Thomas Nelson, Nashville.
- Dietrich, W 2011, *Samuel: Teilband I. 1 Sam 1-12*, Neukirchner Verlag: BKAT, Neukirchner-Vluyn.
- Eslinger, L 1994, *House of God or House of David: The Rhetoric of 2 Samuel 7*, JSOT Press, Sheffield.
- Firth, DG 2001, 'Shining the lamp: The rhetoric of 2 Samuel 5-24', *Tyndale Bulletin*, vol. 55, pp. 203-224. <https://doi.org/10.53751/001c.30267>
- Firth, DG 2005, 'Speech acts and covenant in 2 Samuel 7:1-17', in JA Grant & AI Wilson (eds.), *The God of covenant: Biblical, theological and contemporary perspectives*, Apollos, Leicester, pp. 79-99.
- Firth, DG 2009, '1 and 2 Samuel' in DW Baker & GJ Wenham (eds.), *Apollos Old Testament Commentary*, Apollos, Nottingham.
- Firth, DG 2019, 'Including the stranger: Foreigners in the Former Prophets' in DA Carson (ed.), *New Studies in Biblical Theology*, InterVarsity Press, Westmont.
- Firth, DG 2021a, 'Getting it right while getting it wrong: Joshua's prayer in Joshua 7', in PG Camp & EA Phillips (eds.), *Speaking with God: Probing Old Testament prayers for contemporary significance*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, pp. 192-206.
- Firth, DG 2021b, 'Hannah's prayer as hope for and critique of monarchy', in S Kipfer & J Hutton (eds.), *The book of Samuel and its response to monarchy*, Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, pp. 23-38.
- Firth, DG 2021c, *Joshua: Evangelical Biblical Theology commentary*, Lexham, Bellingham.
- Firth, DG forthcoming, 'Hannah's prayer (1 Samuel 2:1-10): On the interface of poetics and ethics in an embedded poem', in R Briggs, SD Campbell & RG Rohlfing (eds.), *New song*, Lexham, Bellingham.
- Gilmour, R 2014, *Juxtaposition and the Elisha cycle*, T&T Clark, London.
- Hays, JD 2003, 'Has the narrator come to praise Solomon or to bury him?: Narrative subtlety in 1 Kings 1-11', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, vol. 28, pp. 149-174. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030908920302800202>
- Hearson, B 2020, *Go now to Shiloh! A Biblical Theology of sacred space*, B & H Academic, Nashville.
- Howard, DM 1998, *Joshua: New American commentary*, B & H Academic, Nashville.
- Kamp, A 2016, 'The conceptualization of God's dwelling place in 1 Kings 8: A cognitive approach', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, vol. 40, pp. 415-438. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089215613901>
- Klement, HH 2000, *2 Samuel 21-24: Context, structure and meaning in the Samuel Conclusion*, Peter Lang, Bern.
- Knoppers, GN 1995, 'Prayer and propaganda: Solomon's dedication of the temple and the Deuteronomists' program', *CBQ*, vol. 57, pp. 229-255.
- Lewis, TJ 1994, 'The textual history of the Song of Hannah: 1 Samuel II 1-10', *VT*, vol. 44, pp. 18-46. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853394X00033>
- Long, VP 2020, '1 and 2 Samuel: An introduction and commentary' in DG Firth (ed.), *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, InterVarsity Press, London.
- McCarter, PK, Jr 1984, *II Samuel: A new translation with notes and commentary*, Doubleday, Garden City.
- Murray, DF 1998, *Divine prerogative and royal pretension: Pragmatics, poetics and polemics in a narrative sequence about David (2 Samuel 5,17-7,29)*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield.
- Ngan, LLE 1997, '2 Kings 5', *Review and Expositor*, vol. 94, pp. 589-597. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003463739709400409>

- Olley, JW 2003, 'Pharaoh's daughter, Solomon's temple and the palace: Another look at the structure of 1 Kings 1-11', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, vol. 27, pp. 355-369. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030908920302700305>
- Parker, KI 1992, 'Solomon as philosopher King? The nexus of law and wisdom in 1 Kings 1-11', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, vol. 53, pp. 75-91. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030908929201705305>
- Schmid, H 2000, *Das Erste Buch der Könige*, Brockhaus Verlag, Wuppertal.
- Simon, LT 2000, *Identity and identification: An exegetical and theological study of 2 Sam 21-24*, Gregorian University, Rome.
- Stoebe, HJ 1973, *Das erste Buch Samuelis*, Gerd Mohn, KAT, Gütersloh.
- Talstra, E 1993, *Solomon's prayer: Synchrony and diachrony in the composition of 1 Kings 8, 14-61*, Kok Pharos, Kampen.
- Tsumura, DT 2007, *The first book of Samuel*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.
- Van Zyl, AH 1984, '1 Sam 1:2-2:11 - A life world Lament of Affliction', *JNSL*, vol. 12, pp. 151-161.
- Watts, JW 1992, *Psalms and story: Inset hymns in Hebrew narrative*, JSOT Press, Sheffield.
- Wray Beal, LM 2014, *1 & 2 Kings*, Apollos, Nottingham.
- Wright, CJH 2006, *The mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's grand narrative*, InterVarsity Press, Nottingham.

Chapter 3

- Abernethy, AT 2021, *Discovering Isaiah: Content, interpretation, reception*, SPCK, London.
- Aejmelaeus, A 1995, 'Der Prophet als Klageliedsänger. Zur Funktion des Psalms Jes 63, 7-64, 11 in Trito-Isaiah [The Prophet as a Lamentation Singer. On the function of the Psalm Isa 63, 7-64, 11 in Trito-Isaiah]', *ZAW*, vol. 107, pp. 31-50. <https://doi.org/10.1515/zatw.1995.107.1.31>
- Balentine, SE 1981, 'Jeremiah, prophet of prayer', *Review & Expositor*, vol. 78, no. 3, pp. 331-344. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003463738107800304>
- Balentine, SE 1984, 'The prophet as intercessor: A reassessment', *JBL*, vol. 103, no. 2, pp. 161-173. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3260267>
- Balentine, SE 1993, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The drama of divine-human dialogue*, OBT, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Balentine, SE 2006, 'I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask', in MJ Boda, DK Falk & RA Werline (eds.), *Seeking the Favor of God, Vol. 1, Early Judaism and its Literature 21*, Society of Biblical Literature Press, Atlanta, pp. 1-20.
- Barré, ML 2005, *The Lord has saved me. A study of the Psalm of Hezekiah (Isaiah 38:9-20)*, CBQMS 39, CBA, Washington DC.
- Bautch, RJ 2006, 'Lament regained in Trito-Isaiah's penitential prayer', in MJ Boda, DK Falk & RA Werline (eds.), *Seeking the favor of God, Vol. 1, Early Judaism and its Literature 21*, Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, pp. 83-99.
- Berges, U 2015, *Jesaja 49-54*, HThKAT, Herder, Freiburg.
- Beuken, WAM 2004, 'A prayer for the readers of the book of Isaiah: A meditation on Isaiah 12', *Calvin Theological Journal*, vol. 39, no. 2, pp. 381-385.
- Beuken, WAM 2010, *Jesaja 28-39*, HThKAT, Herder, Freiburg.
- Blank, SH 1961, 'Some observations concerning biblical prayer', *Hebrew Union College Annual*, vol. 21, pp. 75-90.
- Blenkinsopp, J 2003, *Isaiah 56-66*, AnchB 19B, Doubleday, New York.
- Boda, MJ 2006, 'Confession as theological expression: Ideological origins of penitential prayer', in MJ Boda, DK Falk & RA Werline (eds.), *Seeking the favor of God, Vol. 1, Early Judaism and its Literature 21*, Society of Biblical Literature Press, Atlanta, pp. 21-50.

- Brueggemann, W 2007, *The theology of the book of Jeremiah, Old Testament Theology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Dekker, J 2017, 'God and the dragons in the book of Isaiah', in K van Bekkum, J Dekker, HR van den Kamp & HGL Peels (eds.), *Playing with Leviathan: Interpretation and reception of monsters from the biblical world*, TBN 21, Brill, Leiden, pp. 21-39.
- Dekker, J 2018, 'Stilling or stirring up the sea? The translation of Isaiah 51:15', in K van Bekkum, G Kwakkel & WH Rose (eds.), *Biblical Hebrew in context: Essays in Semitics and Old Testament texts in Honour of Professor Jan P. Lettinga*, OTS 75, Brill, Leiden, pp. 100-113.
- Dekker, WJ 2020, *Wie is deze? Een onderzoek naar de compositie en Godsvoorstelling van Jesaja 63*, Boekscout, Soest.
- Fischer, G 2005, *Jeremia 1-25*, HThKAT, Herder, Freiburg.
- Fischer, I 1989, 'Who is Jahwe?' *Das Volksklagelied Jes 63,7-64,11 als Ausdruck des Ringens um eine gebrochene Beziehung* [*'Who is Jahwe?' The communal lament Is 63:7-64:11 as expression of the struggle with a broken relationship*], SBB 19, Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, Stuttgart.
- Gärtner, J 2006, "'... Why do you let us stray from your paths ...'" (Isa 63:17): The concept of guilt in the communal Lament Isa 63:7-64:11', in MJ Boda, DK Falk & RA Werline (eds.), *Seeking the Favor of God, Vol. 1, Early Judaism and its Literature 21*, Society of Biblical Literature Press, Atlanta, pp. 145-163.
- Goldingay, J 2009, *Old Testament theology, Vol. 3: Israel's life*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove.
- Hallo, WW 1976, 'The royal correspondence of Larsa: I. A sumerian prototype for the prayer of Hezekiah', in BL Eichler, JW Heimerdinger & ÅW Sjöberg (eds.), *Kramer anniversary volume: Cuneiform studies in Honor of Samuel Noah Kramer*, AOAT 25, Butzon & Bercker, Kevalaer/Neukirchener, Neukirchen-Vluyn, pp. 209-224.
- Hecke, PJP 2003, 'Metaphorical shifts in the Oracle against Babylon (Jeremiah 50-51)', *SJOT*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 68-88. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09018320310000490>
- Klein, A 2021, 'Praying Exodus: Biblical history in the prayer of the servants', in J Stromberg & JT Hibbard (eds.), *The history of Isaiah: The formation of the book and its presentation of the past*, FAT 150, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, pp. 239-253.
- Korpel, MCA 2009, 'The demarcation of hymns and prayers in the Prophets (I)', in R De Hoop, MCA Korpel & SE Porter (eds.), *The impact of unit delimitation on exegesis*, Pericope 7, Brill, Leiden, pp. 115-145.
- Lundbom, JR 1999, *Jeremiah 1-20*, AnchB, Doubleday, New York.
- McKane, W 1986, *Jeremiah Vol. 1*, ICC, T&T Clark, New York.
- McKane, W 1996, *Jeremiah Vol. 2*, ICC, T&T Clark, New York.
- Miller, PD 1994, *They cried to the Lord: The form and theology of biblical prayer*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Oosterhoff, BJ 1994, *Jeremia Vol. 2*, COT, Kok, Kampen.
- Peels, HGL 1995, *The Vengeance of God: The meaning of the root NQM and the function of the NQM-texts in the context of divine revelation in the Old Testament*, OTS 31, Brill, Leiden.
- Stipp, H-J 2019, *Jeremia 25-52*, HAT I/12,2, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen.
- Strawn, BA 2005, 'Jeremiah's in/effective plea: Another look at נָעַר in Jeremiah i 6', *Vetus Testamentum*, vol. 55, no. 3, pp. 366-377. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1568533054359788>
- Tiemeyer, L-S 2005, 'The Watchman Metaphor in Isaiah Lvi-Lxvi', *Vetus Testamentum*, vol. 55, no. 3, pp. 378-400. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1568533054359832>
- Widmer, M 2015, *Standing in the breach: An Old Testament theology and spirituality of intercessory prayer*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake.
- Williamson, HGM 1990, 'Isaiah 63:7-64:11: Exilic lament or post-exilic protest?', *ZAW*, vol. 102, pp. 48-58. <https://doi.org/10.1515/zatw.1990.102.1.48>

Chapter 4

- Achtemeier, E 1986, *Nahum – Malachi. Interpretation, a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching*, Westminster John Knox, Atlanta.
- Allen, LC 1976, *The books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.
- Baldwin, J 1993, 'Jonah', in TE McComiskey (ed.), *The Minor Prophets: An exegetical and expository commentary. Vol. 2: Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, and Habakkuk*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, pp. 543–590.
- Balentine, SE 1993, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The drama of divine-human dialogue. Overtures to Biblical Theology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Beeby, HD 1989, *Hosea: Grace abounding*, International Theological Commentary, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.
- Beeley, R 1970, *Amos: Introduction and commentary*, Banner of Truth, London.
- Benckhuysen, A 2012, 'Revisiting the psalm of Jonah', *Calvin Theological Journal*, vol. 47, no. 1, pp. 5–31.
- Bloesch, DG 1988, *The struggle of prayer*, Helmers & Howard, Colorado Springs.
- Boda, MJ 2004, *Haggai, Zechariah*, The NIV Application Commentary, Zondervan, Grand Rapids.
- Bruce, FF 1993, 'Habakkuk', in TE McComiskey (ed.), *The Minor Prophets: An exegetical and expository commentary. Vol. 2: Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, and Habakkuk*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, pp. 831–896.
- Craigie, PC 1984, *Twelve prophets. Vol. 1. The daily study Bible Old Testament*, Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh.
- Ellul, J 1971, *The judgment of Jonah*, transl. GW Bromiley, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.
- Green, B 2006, 'Profound anger as an optic for reading the prophet Jonah', *Studies in Spirituality*, vol. 16, pp. 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.2143/SIS.16.0.2017789>
- Greenberg, M 1983, *Biblical prose prayer as a window to the popular religion of ancient Israel*, University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Heiler, F 1932, *Prayer: A study in the history and psychology of religion*, Oxford University Press, London.
- Heschel, AJ 1969, *The prophets: An introduction*, vol. 1, Harper & Row, New York.
- Hill, A 2015, 'Prayer in the Minor Prophets (The Book of the Twelve)', in PG Camp & T Longman, III (eds.), *Praying with ancient Israel*, Abilene Christian University Press, Abilene, pp. 69–86.
- Hubbard, DA 1989, *Hosea: An introduction and commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 22a, InterVarsity Press, Leicester.
- Keller, T 2014, *Prayer: Experiencing awe and intimacy with God*, Hodder & Stoughton, London.
- LaCocque, A & Lacocque, P-E 1990, *Jonah: A psycho-religious approach to the prophet*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia.
- Miller, PD 1994, *They cried to the Lord: The form and theology of biblical prayer*, Augsburg Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Moberly, RWL 2003, 'Preaching for a response? Jonah's message to the Ninevites reconsidered', *Vetus Testamentum*, vol. 53, no. 2, pp. 156–168. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853303764664599>
- Moberly, RWL 2015, *Old Testament theology: Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian scripture*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids.
- Moseman, RD 2017, 'Habakkuk's dialogue with faithful Yahweh: A transforming experience', *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, vol. 44, no. 2, pp. 261–274.
- Nysse, R 2017, 'In wrath, remember mercy: A reading of Habakkuk', in MA Throntveit & RA Jacobson (eds.), *Worship the Lord with gladness: Essays in honor of Frederick J. Gaiser*, Word and World Supplement Series, vol. 7, Luther Seminary, St Paul, pp. 156–162.

- Perry, TA 2006, *The honeymoon is over: Jonah's argument with God*, Baker Books, Ada.
- Peterson, EH 1987, *Working the angles: The shape of pastoral integrity*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.
- Peterson, EH 1992, *Under the unpredictable plant: An exploration in vocational holiness*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.
- Roberts, JJM 1991, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, Old Testament Library, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville.
- Robertson, OP 1990, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.
- Rochester, KM 2012a, 'Habakkuk: A guide to prayer', *Expository Times*, vol. 124, no. 1, pp. 17–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0014524612448042>
- Rochester, KM 2012b, *Israel's lament and the discernment of divine revelation: A narrative study*, Lambert Academic Press, Saarbrücken.
- Schellenberg, A 2015, 'An anti-prophet among the prophets?: On the relationship of Jonah to prophecy', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, vol. 39, no. 3, pp. 353–371. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089215577593>
- Thomas, HA 2018, *Habakkuk*, The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.
- Thompson, MEW 1993, 'Prayer, oracle and theophany: The book of Habakkuk', *Tyndale Bulletin*, vol. 44, no. 1, pp. 33–53. <https://doi.org/10.53751/001c.30445>
- Tuell, SS 2017, 'The psalm in Habakkuk 3', in SL Birdsong & S Folov (eds.), *Partners with God: Theological and critical readings of the Bible in honor of Marvin A. Sweeney*, Claremont Press, Claremont, pp. 263–274.
- Vaillancourt, IJ 2015, 'The pious prayer of an imperfect prophet: The psalm of Jonah in its narrative context', *Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 171–189.
- Whitehead, P 2016, 'Habakkuk and the problem of suffering: Theodicy deferred', *Journal of Theological Interpretation*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 265–281. <https://doi.org/10.2307/jtheointe.10.2.0265>
- Yates, G 2016, 'The "weeping prophet" and "pouting prophet" in dialogue: Intertextual connections between Jeremiah and Jonah', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, vol. 59, no. 2, pp. 223–239.

Chapter 5

- Boda, MJ 2017, *The heartbeat of Old Testament Theology: Three creedal expressions*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids.
- Bott, TJ 2014, 'Praise and metonymy in the Psalms', in WP Brown (ed.), *The Oxford handbook of the Psalms*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 131–146.
- Brown, WP 2010, *Psalms*, Abingdon Press, Nashville.
- Brueggemann, W 1988, *Israel's praise: Doxology against idolatry and ideology*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia.
- Brueggemann, W 2003, *An introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian imagination*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville.
- Brueggemann, W 2014, 'On "being human" in the Psalms', in WP Brown (ed.), *The Oxford handbook of the Psalms*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 515–528.
- Foster, RL 2008, 'Topoi of praise in the call to praise Psalms: Toward a theology of the book of Psalms', in RL Foster & DM Howard, Jr (eds.), *My words are lovely: Studies in the rhetoric of the Psalms*, T&T Clark, London, pp. 75–90.
- Gillingham, S 1987, 'Personal piety in die study of the Psalms: A reassessment', PhD thesis, Kelbe College, Oxford.

- Human, DJ 2021, 'Human suffering in need of God's "face" and "eyes": Perspectives on Psalm 13', *Old Testament Essays*, vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 268-284. <https://doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2021/v34n1a15>
- Hutchinson, JH 2005, 'The Psalms and praise', in PS Johnston & DG Firth (eds.), *Interpreting the Psalms*, Apollos, Leicester, pp. 85-100.
- Janowski, B 2010, 'Ein Tempel aus Worten: Zur theologischen Architektur des Psalters', in E Zenger (ed.), *The composition of the book of Psalms*, Peeters, Leuven, pp. 279-308.
- Jeremias, J 2004, 'Worship and theology in the Psalms', in DJ Human & CJA Vos (eds.), *Psalms and liturgy*, T&T Clark, London, pp. 89-101.
- Joubert, M 2021, 'Toward the concept of praise in the Hebrew Bible', MA thesis, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch.
- Keel, O 1997, *The symbolism of the Biblical world: Ancient Near Eastern iconography and the book of Psalms*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake.
- Keller, CA 1971, 'ברך brk segnen', in E Jenni & C Westermann (eds.), *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament, Band I*, Kaiser Verlag, München, pp. 354-375.
- Koehler, L & Baumgartner, W (Hrsg.) 1958, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros*, Brill, Leiden.
- Prinsloo, GTM 2021, 'From desperation to adoration: Reading Psalm 107 as a transforming spatial journey', *Acta Theologica Supplementum*, vol. 32, pp. 392-425. <https://doi.org/10.18820/23099089/actat.Sup32.22>
- Rendtorff, R 2005, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A theology of the Old Testament*, Deo Publishing, Leiden.
- Ringgren, H 1978, 'הלל (הלל)', in GJ Botterweck & H Ringgren (Hrsg.), *Theological dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. III, Wm B Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, p. 406.
- Scharbert, J 1977, 'ברך brk', in GJ Botterweck & H Ringgren (Hrsg.), *Theological dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. I, Wm B Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids.
- Van Rooy, HF 2021, 'Life in the Psalms', in AJ Coetsee & FP Viljoen (eds.), *Biblical Theology of Life in the Old Testament*, Reformed Theology in Africa Series, vol. 5, AOSIS Books, Cape Town, pp. 129-142. <https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2021.BK281.08>
- Von Rad, G 1975, *Old Testament theology volume I The theology of Israel's historical traditions*, SCM, London.
- Waltke, BK & Houston, JM 2010, *The Psalms as Christian worship*, W.B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.
- Westermann, C 1965, *The praise of God in the Psalms*, Westminster John Knox Press, Richmond.
- Westermann, C 1971a, 'הלל הלל loben', in E Jenni & C Westermann (eds.), *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament, Band I*, Kaiser Verlag, München, pp. 493-502.
- Westermann, C 1971b, 'יהוה jdh preisen', in E Jenni & C Westermann (eds.), *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament, Band I*, Kaiser Verlag, München, pp. 674-681.
- Westermann, C 1994, *Lamentations: Issues and interpretation*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Zenger, E 1988, 'The composition and theology of the fifth book of the Psalms, Psalms 107-145', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, vol. 80, pp. 77-102. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030908929802308005>

Chapter 6

- Aejmelaeus, A & Schmidt, L 1986, *The traditional prayer in the Psalms*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin.
- Balentine, SE 1993, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The drama of divine-human dialogue*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Bible 1977, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart.
- Bible 2000, *The Holy Bible: New international version*, Bible Society of South Africa, Cape Town.

- Bonhoeffer, D 1970, *Psalms: The prayer of the Bible*, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis.
- Bonhoeffer, D 1982, *The Psalms: Prayer book of the Bible*, Will Print, Oxford.
- Brueggemann, W 1982, *Raying the Psalms*, Saint Mary's Press & Christian Brothers Publications, Winona.
- Clements-Jewery, P 2005, *Intercessory prayer: Modern theology, biblical teaching and philosophical thought*, Ashgate Publishing, Derbyshire.
- DeClaissé-Walford, NL 2005, 'An intertextual reading of Psalms 22, 23, and 24', in PW Flint & PD Miller (eds.), *The book of Psalms: Composition and reception*, Brill, Leiden, pp. 139-152.
- DeClaissé-Walford, N, Jacobson, RA & LaNeel Tanner, B 2014, *The book of Psalms*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.
- Deverell, GJ 2007, 'The desire of God', *Heythrop Journal*, vol. XLVIII, no. 3, pp. 343-370.
- Futato, MD 2009, *The book of Psalms*, Tyndale House Publisher, Carol Stream.
- Gunkel, H 1977, *Genesis*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen.
- Gunkel, H 1998, *Introduction to Psalms: The genre of the religious lyric of Israel*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene.
- Kraus, H-J 1993a, *Psalms 1-59*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Kraus, H-J 1993b, *Psalms 60-150*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Van Wyk, HF 2019, *Parallel Heidelberg Catechism*, CJBFB, Noordbrug.
- Van Wyk, JA 1982, *Buka ya kereke: Dikwalo tsa Boipolelo-Tumelo le Dikaelo (Tswana)*, NG Sendinguitgewers, Bloemfontein.
- Wallace, HN 2005, *Words to God, word from God: The Psalms in the prayer and preaching of the Church*, Ashgate Publishing, Derbyshire.
- Wenham, G 2013, *The Psalter reclaimed: Praying and praising with the Psalms*, Crossway, Wheaton.
- Westermann, C 1974, 'The role of lament in the theology of the Old Testament', *Interpretation*, vol. 28, pp. 20-38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002096437402800102>
- Zenger, E 1996, *A God of vengeance? Understanding the Psalms of divine wrath*, transl. LM Maloney, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville.

Chapter 7

- Allen, LC 2002, *Psalms 101-150*, rev. edn, Word, Incorporated, Dallas.
- Anderson, BW & Bishop, S 2003, *Out of the depths: The Psalms speak for us today*, 3rd edn, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville.
- Balentine, SE 2006, 'I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask', in MJ Boda, DK Falk & RA Werline (eds.), *Seeking the favour of God volume 1: The origins of penitential prayer in Second Temple Judaism*, Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, pp. 1-20.
- Boda, MJ, Falk, DK & Werline, RA (eds.) 2006, *Seeking the favour of God volume 1: The origins of penitential prayer in Second Temple Judaism*, Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta.
- Burghardt, WJ & Lawler, TC (eds.) 1991, *Cassiodorus: Explanation of the Psalms*, 53rd edn, vol. III, transl. PG Walsh, Paulist Press, New York.
- Craigie, PC & Tate, ME 2004, *Psalms 1-50*, 2nd edn., Nelson Reference & Electronic, Nashville.
- DeClaissé-Walford, N, Jacobson, RA & Tanner, BL 2014, *The book of Psalms (New international commentary on the Old Testament)*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids.
- Fabry, HJ 1977-2012, 'הַיְיָ', in GJ Botterweck, H Ringgren & HJ Fabry (eds.), *Theological dictionary of the Old Testament*, rev. edn. (Logos), vol. V, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, pp. 22-36.
- Hossfeld, FL & Zenger, E 2005, *Psalms 2: A commentary on Psalms 51-100*, K Baltzer (ed.), transl. LM Maloney, The Hermeneia Series, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.

- Hossfeld, FL & Zenger, E 2011, *Psalms 3: A commentary on Psalms 101-150*, K Baltzer (ed.), transl. LM Maloney, The Hermeneia Series, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Knierim, RP 1997, 'אָהַח לָחַטָּא' to miss', in E Jenni & C Westermann (eds.), transl. ME Biddle, *Theological lexicon of the Old Testament*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, pp. 406-411.
- Koch, K 1977-2012a, 'קָטָה', in GJ Botterweck, H Ringgren & HJ Fabry (eds.), *Theological dictionary of the Old Testament*, rev. edn. (Logos), vol. IV, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, pp. 309-319.
- Koch, K 1977-2012b, 'קָטָה', in GJ Botterweck, H Ringgren & HJ Fabry (eds.), *Theological dictionary of the Old Testament*, rev. edn. (Logos), vol. X, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, pp. 546-561.
- Kraus, HJ 1993a, *A continental commentary: Psalms 1-59*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Kraus, HJ 1993b, *A continental commentary: Psalms 60-150*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Longman, T, III 2014, 'Psalms: An introduction and commentary', in DG Firth (ed.), *The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries Series*, vol. 15-16, InterVarsity Press, Nottingham.
- Luther, M 1999, *Luther's works, vol. 14: Selected Psalms III*, JJ Pelikan, HC Oswald & HT Lehmann (eds.), Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis.
- Mayer, G 1977-2012, 'יָהָה', in GJ Botterweck, H Ringgren & HJ Fabry (eds.), *Theological dictionary of the Old Testament*, rev. edn. (Logos), vol. V, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, pp. 427-443.
- Nasuti, HP 1999, 'Defining the sacred songs: Genre, tradition and the post-critical interpretation of the Psalms', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series*, vol. 218, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield.
- Pelikan JJ 1999, 'Introduction', in JJ Pelikan, HC Oswald & HT Lehmann (eds.), *Luther's works, vol. 14: Selected Psalms III*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, pp. ix-xi.
- Seebass, H 1977-2012, 'קָטָה', in GJ Botterweck, H Ringgren & HJ Fabry (eds.), *Theological dictionary of the Old Testament*, rev. edn. (Logos), vol. XII, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, pp. 133-151.
- Seiling, JR 2006, 'The "radical" revisions of the Commentary on the seven penitential Psalms: Luther and his "enemies" (1517-1525)', *Reformation and Renaissance Review*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 28-47. <https://doi.org/10.1558/rrr.v8i1.28>
- Tanner, BL 2007, 'Preaching the penitential psalms', *Word & World*, vol. 27, pp. 88-98.
- Tate, ME 1998, *Psalms 51-100*, Word, Incorporated, Dallas.
- Throntveit, MA 1987, 'The penitential Psalms and Lenten discipline', *Lutheran Quarterly New Series*, vol. 1, no. 4, pp. 495-512.
- Werline, RA 2006, 'Defining Penitential prayer', in MJ Boda, DK Falk & RA Werline (eds.), *Seeking the favour of God volume 1: The origins of penitential prayer in Second Temple Judaism*, Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, pp. xiii-xvii.
- Westermann, C 1974, 'The role of lament in the theology of the Old Testament', *Interpretation*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 20-38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002096437402800102>

Chapter 8

- Alter, R 1984, 'The voice from the whirlwind', *Commentary*, vol. 77, pp. 33-41.
- Althann, R 1999, 'Elihu's contribution to the book of Job', *Old Testament Essays*, vol. 12, pp. 9-12.
- Balentine, SE 2006, *Job*, Smyth & Helwys, Macon.
- Booth, WC 1983, *The rhetoric of fiction*, 2nd edn., University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Breitkopf, A 2020, *Job: From lament to penitence*, Sheffield Phoenix Press, Sheffield.
- Chatman, S 1978, *Story and discourse: Narrative structure in fiction and film*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca.
- Clines, DJA 1989, *Job 1-20*, Word Books, Dallas.

- Clines, DJA 2004, 'Putting Elihu in his place: A proposal for the relocation of Job 32-37', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, vol. 29, pp. 243-253.
- Clines, DJA 2006, *Job 21-37*, Thomas Nelson, Nashville.
- Clines, DJA 2011, *Job 38-42*, Thomas Nelson, Nashville.
- Cooper, BZ 1986, 'Why God? A tale of two sufferers', *Theology Today*, vol. 42, pp. 423-434.
- Dhorme, E 1967, *A commentary on the book of Job*, transl. H Knight, Nelson, London.
- Fishbane, MA 1971, 'Jeremiah IV 23-26 and Job III 3-13: A recovered use of the creation pattern', *Vetus Testamentum*, vol. 21, pp. 151-167.
- Fohrer, G 1963, *Das Buch Hiob*, Gütersloh Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, Gütersloh.
- Girard, R 1987, *Job the victim of his people*, transl. Y Freccero, Athlone, London.
- Good, EM 1990, *In turns of tempest: A reading of Job, with a translation*, Stanford University Press, Stanford.
- Greenstein, EL 1996, 'A forensic understanding of the speech from the whirlwind', in MV Fox (ed.), *Text, temple and traditions*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, pp. 241-258.
- Greenstein, EL 2003, 'The poem on wisdom in Job 28 in its conceptual and literary contexts', in E van Wolde (ed.), *Job 28: Cognition in context*, Brill, Leiden, pp. 253-280.
- Gruber, MI 1980, *Aspects of non-verbal communication in the ancient Near East*, 2 vols., Biblical Institute Press, Rome.
- Guillaume, P 2000, 'Caution: Rhetorical questions!', *Biblische Notizen*, vol. 103, pp. 11-16.
- Guillaume, P 2007, 'Job's intercession: Antidote to divine folly', *Biblica*, vol. 88, pp. 457-472.
- Gutiérrez, G 1987, *On Job: God-talk and the suffering of the innocent*, transl. MJ O'Connell, Orbis Books, Marknoll.
- Habel, NC 1985, *The book of Job: A commentary*, Westminster John Knox Press, Philadelphia.
- Hartley, JE 1988, *The book of Job*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.
- Ho, E 2009, 'In the eyes of the beholder: Unmarked attributed quotations in Job', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 128, pp. 703-715.
- Ho, E 2012, 'A quest for coherence: A study of internal quotations in the book of Job', PhD thesis, McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, Ontario, viewed 05 April 2023, <<http://hdl.handle.net/11375/15374>>
- Janzen, JG 1985, *Job*, Westminster John Knox Press, Atlanta.
- Krüger, T 2007, 'Did Job repent?', in T Krüger, M Oeming, K Schmid & C Uehlinger (eds.), *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen: Beiträge zum Hiob-Symposium auf dem Monte Verità vom 14.-19. August 2005*, Theologischer Verlag Zürich, Zürich, pp. 217-229.
- Morrow, WS 1986, 'Consolation, rejection, and repentance in Job 42:6', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 105, pp. 211-225.
- Muenchow, C 1989, 'Dust and dirt in Job 42:6', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 108, pp. 597-611.
- Musil, A 1907-8, *Arabia Petraea*, see comment above at Gruber and advise. vols, Hölder, Vienna.
- Nel, PJ 1991, 'Cosmos and Chaos: A reappraisal of the divine discourses in the book of Job', *Old Testament Essays*, vol. 4, pp. 206-226.
- Newsom, CA 1996, 'The book of Job: Introduction, commentary, and reflections', in LE Keck et al. (eds), *The new interpreter's Bible*, vol. 4, Abingdon, Nashville, pp. 319-637.
- Ngwa, K 2005, *The hermeneutics of the 'happy' ending in Job 42:7-17*, De Gruyter, Berlin.
- Oeming, M 2000, "'Ihr habt nicht recht von mir geredet wie mein Knecht Hiob" (Hi 42,7). Gottes Schlußwort als Schlüssel zur Interpretation des Hiobbuchs und als kritische Anfrage an die moderne Theologie ["You spoke not rightly of me like my servant Job" (Job 42:7). God's final word as a key to the interpretation of the book of Job and as a critical question to modern theology]', *Evangelische Theologie*, vol. 60, pp. 103-116.

References

- Perdue, LG 1987, 'Job's assault on creation', *Harvard Annual Review*, vol. 10, pp. 295–315.
- Perdue, LG 1991, *Wisdom in revolt: Metaphorical theology in the book of Job*, Almond, Sheffield.
- Phelan, J 1989, *Reading people, reading plots: Character, progression, and the interpretation of narrative*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Phelan, J 2005, *Living to tell about it: A rhetoric and ethics of character narration*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca.
- Pohl, WC, VI 2020, *Ethical God-talk in the book of Job: Speaking to the almighty*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London.
- Pope, MH 1973, *Job: Introduction, translation, and notes*, 3rd edn., Doubleday, Garden City.
- Roberts, JJM 1974, 'Job's Summons to Yahweh: The exploitation of a legal metaphor', *Restoration Quarterly*, vol. 16, pp. 159–165.
- Tilley, TW 1989, 'God and the silencing of Job', *Modern Theology*, vol. 5, pp. 257–270.
- Vogels, W 1994, 'Job's pious slogans (Job 1,20–22; 2,8–10)', in WAM Beuken (ed.), *The book of Job*, Leuven University Press, Leuven, pp. 369–376.
- Vogels, W 1995, *Job: L'homme Qui A Bien Parlé de Dieu*, Cerf, Paris.
- Weiss, M 1983, *The story of Job's beginning: Job 1-2: A literary analysis*, Magnes, Jerusalem.
- Westermann, C 1978, *The structure of the book of Job*, transl. CA Muenchow, Fortress Press, Philadelphia.
- Whybray, RN 1998, *Job*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield.
- Wilson, L 1996, 'The role of the Elihu speeches in the book of Job', *Reformed Theological Review*, vol. 55, pp. 81–94.
- Wolfers, D 1995, *Deep things out of darkness: The book of Job: Essays and a new English translation*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.
- Zuckerman, B 1991, *Job the silent: A study in historical counterpoint*, Oxford University Press, New York.

Chapter 9

- Albrektson, B 1963, 'Studies in the text and theology of the book of Lamentations with a critical edition of the Peshitta text', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 142–143. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X0005686X>
- Alexiou, M 2002, *The ritual lament in Greek tradition*, 2nd edn., Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham.
- Bailey, RC 2016, 'Jeremiah: Fortified city, bronze walls, and iron pillar against the whole land', *Hebrew Studies*, vol. 57, pp. 117–138. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hbr.2016.0006>
- Balentine, SE 1993, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The drama of divine-human dialogue*, Overtures to Biblical Theology, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Balentine, SE 2000, 'Prayer', in DN Freedman (ed.), *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, pp. 1077–1079.
- Barré, ML 2001, "'Wandering about" as a topos of depression in ancient Near Eastern literature and in the Bible', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 60, no. 3, pp. 177–187.
- Barth, J 1893, *Etymologische Studien zum Semitischen insbesondere zum Hebräischen Lexicon*, Hinrichs, Leipzig.
- Barthélemy, D 1963, 'Les devanciers d'Aquila', in *Vetus Testamentum*, suppl. 10, Brill, Leiden.
- Baumann, G 2005, "'Er hat mir den Weg mit Quadersteinen vermauert" (Thr 3:9): Ein Vorschlag zur Auslegung einer ungewöhnlichen Metapher', in P van Hecke (ed.), *Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible*, Peeters, Leuven, pp. 139–145.
- Berges, U 2002, 'Klagelieder', in *Herder's Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament [Herder's Theological Commentary on the Old Testament]*, Verlag Herder, Freiburg.

- Berlin, A 2002, 'Lamentations: A commentary', in *Old Testament Library*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville.
- Bier, MJ 2015, 'Perhaps there is hope: Reading Lamentations as a polyphony of pain, penitence, and protest', in *Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies* 603, *The Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. 69, no. 1. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/flx188>
- Boase, E 2006, 'The fulfillment of doom? The dialogic interaction between the book of Lamentations and the pre-exilic/early exilic prophetic literature', in *Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies*, vol. 437, T&T Clark, New York. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056390907000112>
- Cameron-Mowat, A 2011, 'Lamentations and Christian worship', in RA Parry & HA Thomas (eds.), *Great is thy faithfulness? Reading Lamentations as sacred scripture*, Pickwick Books, Eugene, pp. 139-141.
- Cohen, ME 1988, *The canonical lamentations of ancient Mesopotamia*, 2 vols., Capital Decisions, Potomac.
- Cross, FM 2000, '4QLam', in E Ulrich, FM Cross, JA Fitzmyer, PW Flint, S Metso, CM Murphy et al. (eds.), *Qumran Cave 4 XI: Psalms to Chronicles*, Discoveries in the Judaean Desert 16, Clarendon Press, Oxford, pp. 229-237.
- Delnero, P 2020, 'How to do things with tears: Ritual lamenting in ancient Mesopotamia', in G Rubio (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records*, vol. 26, De Gruyter, Berlin. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501512650>
- Dobbs-Allsopp, FW 1993, 'Weep, O Daughter of Zion: A study of the city-lament genre in the Hebrew Bible', in G Rubio, *Biblica et Orientalia*, vol. 44, Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Rome. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501512650>
- Driver, GR 1950, 'Hebrew notes on "Song of Songs" and "Lamentations"', in W Baumgartner, O Eissfeldt, K Elliger & L Rost (eds.), *Festschrift Alfred Bertholet zum 80: Geburtstag*, J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen, pp. 134-146.
- Eidevall, G 2005, 'Spatial metaphors in Lamentations 3:1-9', in P van Hecke (ed.), *Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible*, Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum Iovaniensium 187, Peeters, Leuven, pp. 133-137.
- Enmarch, R 2013, 'Mortuary and literary laments: A comparison', in R Enmarch & VM Lepper (eds.), *Ancient Egyptian literature: Theory and practice*, Proceedings of the British Academy 188, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 83-99.
- Frevel, C 2017, *Die Klagelieder*, Neuer Stuttgarter Kommentar, Altes Testament 20/1, Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, Stuttgart.
- Gabbay, U 2014, *Pacifying the hearts of the gods: Sumerian emesal prayers of the first millennium BC*, Heidelberger Emesal-Studien 1, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden.
- Gabbay, U 2020, 'Defeat literature in the cult of the victorious: Ancient Mesopotamian Sumerian city laments', in K Streit & M Grohmann (eds.), *Culture of defeat: Submission in written sources and archaeological record*, Gorgias Press, Piscataway, pp. 121-138.
- George, AR 2003, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh epic: Introduction, critical edition and cuneiform texts*, 2 vols., Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Goldingay, J 2021, 'Models for prayer in Lamentations and Psalms', in HA Thomas & BN Melton (eds.), *Reading Lamentations intertextually*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament studies 714, T&T Clark, London, pp. 139-151.
- Goldingay, J 2022, *The book of Lamentations*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.
- Gottlieb, H 1978 'A Study on the text of Lamentations', in F Schöningh (ed.), *Acta Jutlandica XLVIII (Theology Series 12)*, *Archiv für katholisches Kirchenrecht*, vol. 165, no. 2, Det lærde Selskab, Århus, pp. 284-285. <https://doi.org/10.30965/2589045X-16502018>
- Gwaltney, WC 1991, 'The biblical book of Lamentations in the context of Near Eastern lament literature', in FE Greenspahn (ed.), *Essential papers on Israel and the ancient Near East*, New York University Press, New York, pp. 242-265.

References

- Hallo, WW 1995, 'Lamentations and prayers in Sumer and Akkad', in JM Sasson (ed.), *Civilizations of the ancient Near East*, vol. 3, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, pp. 1871-1881.
- Hillers, DR 1992, *Lamentations: A new translation with introduction and commentary*, Anchor Bible 7A, 2nd edn., Doubleday, New York.
- Jahnow, H 1923, *Das hebräische Leichenlied im Rahmen der Völkerdichtung*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 36, A. Töpelmann, Giessen.
- Janowski, B 2019, *Anthropologie des Alten Testaments: Grundfragen—Kontexte—Themenfelder*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen.
- Kalman, J 2019, 'Authorship, attribution, and authority: Jeremiah, Baruch, and the rabbinic interpretation of Lamentations', *Hebrew Union College Annual*, vol. 90, pp. 27-87. <https://doi.org/10.15650/hebruniocollannu.90.2019.0027>
- Keel, O 1997, *The symbolism of the biblical world: Ancient Near Eastern iconography and the book of Psalms*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake.
- King, PD 2012, *Surrounded by bitterness: Image schemas and metaphors for conceptualizing distress in Classical Hebrew*, Pickwick Books, Eugene.
- Kitchen, KA 1975, *Ramesside inscriptions: Historical and biographical*, vol. 1, Blackwell, Oxford.
- Koenen, K 2015 'Klagelieder (Threni) (new arrangement)', in B Ego, F Hartenstein, BU Schipper & M Rösel (eds.), *Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament*, vol. 20, Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchen-Vluyn.
- Kotzé, GR 2013, *The Qumran manuscripts of Lamentations: A text-critical study*, *Studia Semitica Neerlandica* 61, Brill, Leiden.
- Kotzé, GR 2020a, *Images and ideas of debated readings in the book of Lamentations*, *Orientalische Religionen in der Antike* 38, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen.
- Kotzé, GR 2020b, 'Human and divine persecution in the MT and LXX Lamentations 3:52-66', in NPL Allen, PJ Jordaan & J Zsengellér (eds.), *Passion, persecution, and epiphany in early Jewish literature*, Routledge, London, pp. 99-125.
- Kotzé, GR 2020c, 'Reconsidering the debated reading in LXX Lamentations 3:45', in E Bons, M Geiger, F Ueberschaer, M Sigismund & M Meiser (eds.), *Die Septuaginta – Themen, Manuskripte, Wirkungen*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 444, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, pp. 620-629.
- Kotzé, GR 2021a, 'The "dirty deeds" of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in Jerusalem and the rhetorical purposes of 2Maccabees', in NPL Allen & PJ Jordaan (eds.), *Rhetoric in 2Maccabees: Challenging God*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, pp. 91-106.
- Kotzé, GR 2021b, 'Life in the scrolls: Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther', in AJ Coetsee & FP Viljoen (eds.), *Biblical Theology of life in the Old Testament*, *Reformed Theology in Africa Series*, vol. 5, AOSIS Books, Cape Town, pp. 185-199. <https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2021.BK281.11>
- Kotzé, GR 2021c, 'The Lord's positively hostile actions against Jerusalem in LXX Lamentations 2:5', in E Dafni (ed.), *Law and justice in Jerusalem, Babylon and Hellas: Studies on the theology of the Septuagint volume III*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 475, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, pp. 377-391.
- Kruger, PA 2012, 'Disaster and the topos of the world upside down: Selected cases from the ancient Near Eastern world', in A Berlejung (ed.), *Disaster and relief management/ Katastrophen und ihre Bewältigung*, *Forschungen zum Alten Testament* 81, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, pp. 391-424.
- Labahn, A 2021, 'From anonymity to biography: Jeremiah as a character memorizing the past in the Septuagint version of Lamentations', in HA Thomas & BN Melton (eds.), *Reading Lamentations intertextually*, *Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament studies* 714, T&T Clark, London, pp. 219-241.
- Lambert, WG 1987, 'A further attempt at the Babylonian "Man and his God"', in F Rochberg-Halton (ed.), *Language, literature, and history: Philological and historical studies presented to Erica Reiner*, *American Oriental Series* 67, American Oriental Society, New Haven, pp. 187-202.

- Lambert, WG 2013, *Babylonian creation myths*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake.
- Lenzi, A 2019, *An introduction to Akkadian literature: Contexts and content*, Eisenbrauns, University Park.
- Lichtheim, M 2006, *Ancient Egyptian literature*, vol. 1, University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Liverani, M 2017, 'Thoughts on the Assyrian empire and Assyrian kingship', in E Frahm (ed.), *A companion to Assyria*, John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken, pp. 534–546.
- Löhnert, A 2011, 'Manipulating the gods: Lamenting in context', in K Radner & E Robson (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of cuneiform culture*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 402–417.
- Parry, RA 2011, 'Wrestling with Lamentations in Christian worship', in RA Parry & HA Thomas (eds.), *Great is Thy faithfulness? Reading Lamentations as sacred scripture*, Pickwick Books, Eugene, pp. 175–197.
- Provan, IW 1991, 'Past, present and future in Lamentations III 52–66: The case for a precative perfect re-examined', *Vetus Testamentum*, vol. 41, no. 2, pp. 164–175. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853391X00441>
- Rainey, AF 2015, 'The El-Amarna correspondence: A new edition of the cuneiform letters from the site of El-Amarna based on collations of all extant tablets', in *Handbook of Oriental Studies*, vol. 110, no. 1, Brill, Leiden.
- Renkema, J 1998, *Lamentations*, Historical commentary on the Old Testament, Peeters, Leuven.
- Rom-Shiloni, D 2021, *Voices from the ruins: Theodicy and the fall of Jerusalem in the Hebrew Bible*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.
- Salters, RB 2010, *Lamentations*, International Critical Commentary, T&T Clark, London.
- Schäfer, R 2004, 'Lamentations', in A Schenker, YAP Goldman, A van der Kooij, GJ Norton, S Pisano, J de Waard et al. (eds.), *General introduction and Megilloth*, Biblia Hebraica Quinta 18, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart, pp. 54–72, 113*–136*.
- Staubli, T & Schroer, S 2014, *Menschenbilder der Bibel*, Patmos Verlag, Ostfildern.
- Stern, ER 2011, 'Lamentations in Jewish liturgy', in RA Parry & HA Thomas (eds.), *Great is Thy faithfulness? Reading Lamentations as sacred scripture*, Pickwick Books, Eugene, pp. 88–91.
- Suter, A (ed.) 2008, *Lament: Studies in the ancient Mediterranean and beyond*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Weippert, H & Weippert, M 2013, 'Der betende Mensch: Eine Außenansicht', in A Grund, A Krüger & F Lippke (eds.), *Ich will dir danken unter den Völkern: Studien zur israelitischen und altorientalischen Gebetsliteratur*, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, Gütersloh, pp. 436–490.
- Westermann, C 1994, *Lamentations: Issues and interpretation*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Winter, IJ 1983, 'The program of the throneroom of Assurnasirpal II', in PO Harper & H Pittman (eds.), *Essays on Near Eastern art and archaeology in Honor of Charles Kyrle Wilkinson*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, pp. 15–31.

Chapter 10

- Alter, R 1981, *The art of biblical narrative*, Basic, New York.
- Balentine, SE 1993, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible*, Overtures to Biblical Theology, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Boda, JJ 1999, *Praying the tradition: The origin and use of tradition in Nehemiah 9*, Beihefte für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 277, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin.
- Carr, DM 2015, *Holy resilience: The Bible's traumatic origins*, Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Collins, JJ 1979, 'Introduction: Towards the morphology of a genre', *Semeia*, vol. 14, pp. 1–20.
- Collins, JJ 1993, *Daniel, Hermeneia*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Doukhan, JB 1987, *Daniel: The vision of the end*, Andrews University Press, Berrien Springs.
- Gillingham, S 1996, 'Psalmody and apocalyptic in the Hebrew Bible: Common vision, shared experience', in J Barton & DJ Reimer (eds.), *After the Exile: Essays in honour of Rex Mason*, Mercer University Press, Macon, pp. 147–169.

References

- Goldingay, J 1989, *Daniel*, WBC, Word, Dallas.
- LaCocque, A 1976, 'The liturgical prayer in Daniel 9', *Hebrew Union College Annual*, vol. 47, pp. 119-142.
- Lebram, JCH 1970, 'Apokalyptik und Hellenismus im Buche Daniel: Bemerkungen und Gedanken zu Martin Hengels Buch über "Judentum und Hellenismus" [Apocalypticism and Hellenism in the book of Daniel: Remarks and Thoughts on Martin Hengel's Book on Judaism and Hellenism]', *Vetus Testamentum*, vol. 20, pp. 503-524. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1516480>
- Miller, SR 1994, *Daniel*, New American Commentary 18, Broadman & Holman, Nashville.
- Montgomery, J 1927, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the book of Daniel*, ICC, T&T Clark, Edinburgh.
- O'Connor, KM 2011, *Jeremiah: Pain and promise*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Russell, DS 1964, *The method and message of Jewish apocalyptic*, Westminster John Knox Press, Philadelphia.
- Sheriffs, DCT 1988, "'A tale of two cities" - Nationalism in Zion and Babylon', *Tyndale Bulletin*, vol. 39, pp. 19-57. <https://doi.org/10.53751/001c.30549>
- Smith-Christopher, D 2001, 'Prayers and dreams: Power and diaspora identities in the social setting of the Daniel tales', in JJ Collins & PW Flint (eds.), *The book of Daniel: Composition and reception*, vol. 1, Brill, Leiden, pp. 266-289.
- Thompson, T 1994, *The early history of the Israelite people from the written and archaeological records*, Brill, Leiden.
- Towner, WS 1971, 'Retributional theology in the apocalyptic setting', *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, vol. 26, pp. 204-214.
- Van der Kooij, A 1993, 'The concept of covenant (berit) in the book of Daniel', in AS van der Woude (ed.), *The book of Daniel in the light of new findings*, Leuven University Press, Leuven, pp. 495-501.
- Venter, PM 1996, 'Daniël 7-12 in sosiaal-wetenskaplike perspektief [Daniel 7-12 in social scientific perspective]', *HTS Theological Studies*, vol. 52, no. 4, a1546. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v52i4.1546>
- Venter, PM 2000, 'Understanding the concept of "time" in Daniel', *Skrif en kerk*, vol. 21, no. 3, pp. 666-681. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v21i3.659>
- Venter, PM 2004, 'Constitutionalised space in Daniel 9', *HTS Theological Studies*, vol. 60, nos. 1&2, pp. 607-624. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v60i1/2.497>
- Venter, PM 2005, 'Penitential prayers in the books of Baruch and Daniel', *Old Testament Essays*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 406-425.
- Vogel, W 1996, 'Cultic motifs and themes in the book of Daniel', *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 21-50.
- Vogel, W 2010, *The cultic motif in the book of Daniel*, Peter Lang, New York.
- Werline, RA 2004, 'Prayer, politics, and social vision in Daniel 9 and Baruch 1:15-3:8', paper presented at the meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Consultation: Penitential Prayer: Origin, Development and Impact, 21 November, viewed 24 March 2021, <<http://divinity.mcmaster.ca/prayer>>
- Wiggins, G 2015, *What close reading actually means*, viewed 06 April 2021, <<https://www.teachthought.com/literacy/what-close-reading-actually-means/>>

Chapter 11

- Allen, LC 2002, *Psalms 101-150 (Revised)*, Word Incorporated, Dallas.
- Bright, J 1953, *The Kingdom of God*, Abingdon Press, Nashville.
- Brueggemann, W 1997, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.

- Carson, DA 1991, *The Gospel according to John*, Apollos, Nottingham.
- Crenshaw, JL 1975, *Hymnic affirmation of divine justice*, SBLDS 24, Scholars Press, Missoula.
- Fensham, CF 1981, 'Neh. 9 and Pss. 105, 106, 135 and 136: Post-exilic historical traditions in poetic form', *JNSL*, vol. 9, pp. 35–51.
- Goldsworthy, G 1991, *According to plan: The unfolding revelation of God in the Bible*, InterVarsity Press, Nottingham.
- Kidner, D 1979, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, InterVarsity Press, Leicester.
- Noss, PA & Thomas, K 1985, *A handbook on Ezra and Nehemiah*, UBS Handbook Series, UBS, New York.
- Russell, DD 1960, *Between the Testaments*, SCM Press, London.
- Williamson, HGM 1985, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, Word Biblical Commentary, Word Books, Dallas.

Chapter 12

- Balentine, SE 1997, "'You can't pray a lie": Truth and fiction in the prayers of Chronicles', in MP Graham, KG hoglund, SL McKenzie, A Mein & CV Camp (eds.), *The Chronicler as historian*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, pp. 246–267.
- Beentjes, PC 2008, "'Give thanks to YHWH. Truly he is good": Psalms and prayers in the Book of Chronicles', in PC Beentjes (ed.), *Tradition and transformation in the Book of Chronicles*, Brill, Leiden, pp. 141–176.
- Ben Zvi, E 2011, 'On social memory and identity formation in late Persian Yehud. A historian's viewpoint with a focus on prophetic literature, Chronicles and the Deuteronomistic historical collection', in LC Jonker (ed.), *Texts, contexts and readings in post-exilic literature: Explorations into historiography and identity negotiation in Hebrew Bible and related texts*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, pp. 95–148.
- Ben Zvi, E 2014, 'Chronicles and Samuel–Kings: Two interacting aspects of one memory system in the late Persian/Early Hellenistic period', in U Becker & H Bezzel (eds.), *Rereading the relecture? The question of (post)chronistic influence in the latest redactions of the books of Samuel*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, pp. 41–56.
- Brettler, MZ 2017, 'Those who pray together stay together: The role of late psalms in creating identity', in MS Pajunen & J Penner (eds.), *Functions of Psalms and prayers in the late Second Temple period*, De Gruyter, Berlin, pp. 277–304.
- Gerstenberger, E 2001, *Theologien im Alten Testament: Pluralität und Synkretismus Alttestamentlichen Gottesglaubens*, W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart.
- Gillmayr-Bucher, S & Häusl, M 2019, *Prayers and the construction of Israelite identity*, Society of Biblical Literature Press, Atlanta.
- Heard, RC 2002, 'Echoes of Genesis in 1 Chronicles 4:9–10: An intertextual and contextual reading of Jabez's prayer', *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.5508/jhs.2002.v4.a2>
- Hilpert, A 2022, *Die Komposition der Chronikbücher: Redaktionsgeschichtliche Studien zu 2 Chr 10–36*, De Gruyter, Berlin.
- Japhet, S 1993, *I & II Chronicles: A commentary*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville.
- Jonker, LC 2002, 'Completing the temple with the celebration of Josiah's Passover?', *Old Testament Essays*, vol. 15, pp. 381–397.
- Jonker, LC 2003, *Reflections of King Josiah in Chronicles: Late stages of the Josiah reception in II Chr. 34f*, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, Gütersloh.
- Jonker, LC 2006, 'The Cushites in the Chronicler's version of Asa's reign: A secondary audience in Chronicles?', *Old Testament Essays*, vol. 19, pp. 863–881.
- Jonker, LC 2011, 'The Chronicler singing psalms: Revisiting the Chronicler's psalm in 1 Chronicles 16', in HM Niemann & M Augustin (eds.), *'My spirit at rest in the north country' (Zechariah*

- 6.8): *Collected communications to the XXth congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament*, Helsinki, Peter Lang, Frankfurt, pp. 115–130.
- Jonker, LC 2012, 'What do the "good" and the "bad" Kings have in common? Genre and terminological patterns in the Chronicler's royal narratives', *Journal of Semitics*, vol. 21, pp. 332–365.
- Jonker, LC 2013a, *1 & 2 Chronicles*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids.
- Jonker, LC 2013b, 'Was the Chronicler more Deuteronomic than the Deuteronomist? Explorations into the Chronicler's relationship with Deuteronomic legal traditions', *Scandinavian Journal for the Old Testament*, vol. 27, pp. 191–203. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0018328.2013.839107>
- Jonker, LC 2013c, 'Why history matters: The place of historical consciousness in a multidimensional approach towards Biblical interpretation', *Verbum et Ecclesia*, vol. 34, a775. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v34i2.775>
- Jonker, LC 2016a, 'Being both on the periphery and in the centre: The Jerusalem temple in late Persian period Yehud from postcolonial perspective', in E Ben Zvi & C Levin (eds.), *Centres and peripheries in the early Second Temple period*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, pp. 243–267.
- Jonker, LC 2016b, *Defining all-Israel in Chronicles: Multi-levelled identity negotiation in late Persian period Yehud*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen.
- Jonker, LC 2018a, 'Chronicles in an (un)changing world: The "Persian context" in Biblical studies', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, vol. 42, pp. 267–283. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089216677670>
- Jonker, LC 2018b, 'Further interrogation of the comparative paradigm in African biblical scholarship: Towards an analogical hermeneutics for interpreting the Old Testament in Africa', in J Punt & MJ Nel (eds.), *Reading, writing right: Festschrift for Elna Mouton*, African Sun Media, Stellenbosch, pp. 73–97.
- Jonker, LC 2020a, *Herinnering & verlange: Gesprekke oor mag, geskiedenis en die Bybel*, African Sun Media, Stellenbosch.
- Jonker, LC 2020b, 'Holiness and the Levites. Some reflections on the relationship between Chronicles and pentateuchal traditions', in JJ Krause, W Oswald & K Weingart (eds.), *Eigensinn und Entstehung der Hebräischen Bibel. Erhard Blum zum Siebzigsten Geburtstag*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, pp. 457–474.
- Jonker, LC 2020c, 'Melting pots and rejoinders? The interplay among literature formation processes during the Late Persian and early hellenistic periods', *Vetus Testamentum*, vol. 70, pp. 42–54. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685330-12341426>
- Kim, K 2021, *Shaping Israelite identity through prayers in the book of Chronicles: The Chronicler's hope for liturgical community*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene.
- Klein, RW 2012, *2 Chronicles: A commentary*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Knoppers, GN 2004, *1 Chronicles 10–29: A new translation with introduction and commentary*, Doubleday, New York.
- Koehler, L & Baumgartner, W 2001, *The Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament (HALOT)*, transl. MEJ Richardson, Brill, Leiden.
- Kratz, RG 2005, *Composition of the narrative books of the Old Testament*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London.
- Matlock, MD 2017, 'The function of Psalmic prayers in Chronicles: Literary-rhetorical method in conversation with ritual theory', *The Asbury Journal*, vol. 72, pp. 91–106.
- Matlock, MD 2019, 'Rhetorically and ideologically shaping the narrative thought. Direct and indirect prayer speech in Chronicles', in S Gillmayr-Bucher & M Häußl (eds.), *Prayers and the construction of Israelite identity*, Society of Biblical Literature Press, Atlanta, pp. 91–106.
- McKenzie, SL 2004, *1 & 2 Chronicles*, Abingdon, Nashville.
- Newman, JH 1996, *Praying by the book: The scripturalization of prayer in Second Temple Judaism*, Harvard University, Cambridge.

- O'Kennedy, DF 2006, 'Twee Weergawes van die Gebed van Salomo (1 Kon. 8 en 2 Kron. 6): 'n Vergelykende Studie', *Acta Theologica*, vol. 26, pp. 155-177.
- Plöger, O 2000, 'Speech and prayer in the Deuteronomistic and the Chronicler's histories', in GN Knoppers & JG McConville (eds.), *Reconsidering Israel and Judah*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, pp. 31-46.
- Reif, SC 2015, 'The place of prayer in early Judaism', in R Egger-Wenzel & SC Reif (eds.), *Ancient Jewish prayers and emotions: Emotions associated with Jewish prayer in and around the Second Temple period*, De Gruyter, Berlin.
- Schmid, K 2012, *The Old Testament: A literary history*, transl. L Maloney, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Schuller, EM 2017, 'Psalms, hymns, and prayers in late Second Temple Judaism', in MS Pajunen & J Penner (eds.), *Functions of psalms and prayers in the late Second Temple period*, De Gruyter, Berlin, pp. 5-23.
- Swanson, JA 1997, *Dictionary of biblical languages with semantic domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*, Logos Research Systems, Oak Harbor.
- Throntveit, MA 1987, *When kings speak: Royal speech and royal prayer in Chronicles*, Scholars Press, Sheffield.
- Willi, T 1972, *Die Chronik als Auslegung: Untersuchungen zur literarischen Gestaltung der historischen Überlieferung Israels*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen.
- Willi, T 1995, *Juda, Jehud, Israel: Studien zum Selbstverständnis des Judentums in persischer Zeit*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen.
- Williamson, HGM 1982, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.

Index

A

ambiguity, 53–54, 131
anger, 15, 17, 19, 52–53, 61, 67, 74–76, 109, 111,
121, 123, 144, 149, 154, 163, 168, 183
ascription, 166–167, 171, 173

C

Cassiodorus, 113–114
character, 11, 13, 16–18, 21–23, 36, 42, 47–50,
52, 57, 61–62, 68, 80, 122, 126, 129–130,
150–151, 155, 168, 171, 173, 176, 191
Chronicles, 195–204, 206–213
communication, 7, 9–10, 12, 23, 44, 61, 141,
147–148
compassion, 53, 60, 71, 73–74, 76–78, 85, 92,
153, 165, 167, 169, 183–185, 189
complaint, 25–26, 36, 44, 60–61, 64, 92–93,
99, 102, 110, 117, 124, 131, 140
confession of sins, 113, 118, 120–121, 167
confession, 52–53, 55, 58, 60, 64, 108,
113–115, 117–127, 132–134, 143, 165–168,
171, 173, 177, 179–180, 182–190, 192,
200, 209, 212–213
covenant, 8–13, 15–23, 35–36, 39, 50, 54–55,
57–62, 65, 85, 91–92, 161–162, 165, 167,
177–179, 181, 183–185, 191–192, 203,
208–209, 212–213
creation, 12, 14, 51–52, 57, 59, 91, 101, 138,
141–142, 150, 163, 170, 183–184, 187
cultic motifs, 159–160, 162, 164

D

Daniel, 118, 159–166, 168–173, 182, 184, 186,
190
death, 19, 22, 46, 50, 61, 71–72, 74–75, 95,
97–100, 103, 105–106, 111, 130, 132,
134–136, 143, 150, 161–162, 177, 185, 202
Deuteronomy, 3, 8, 20, 22
dialogue, 61, 63, 65–69, 72–76, 85, 132–133,
136–139, 142, 144, 196

E

emotion, 74–77, 179–180
Exodus/exodus, 8, 10, 12–18, 20–21, 35, 51, 53,
57–60, 117, 164, 168, 177, 183, 188, 191
Ezra, 118, 175–182, 184–193

F

figurative language, 156
forgiveness, 38–41, 85, 104, 113, 115–116, 118,
120–122, 126–127, 133–134, 163, 165–169,
172, 189–190, 200, 209

H

Habakkuk, 64–65, 67, 78–84

I

individual laments, 108, 113, 115, 117, 121
intercession, 8–9, 12–14, 16–21, 23, 44, 47–48,
54–55, 58, 61–62, 64, 67, 101–102, 104,
106–108, 110, 112, 145
Isaiah, 8, 43–47, 49, 51–54, 59–60, 62, 83,
177, 191, 201, 211

J

Jeremiah, 43–45, 47–49, 54–58, 60–62, 67,
69–70, 74–76, 79, 83, 131–132, 135, 149,
157, 162, 165–166, 173
Jonah, 64–65, 67, 69–78, 81, 191
Joshua, 18, 20, 22, 25–26, 42, 178, 197
Judges, 25–26, 42, 58, 192, 205
justice, 45, 61, 64, 66–67, 69, 81, 92, 104, 107,
111, 132, 144, 153, 155, 162, 167–168, 181

K

Kings, 8, 22, 25–27, 37, 40–42, 45, 49, 70,
76, 97, 144, 154, 165, 172–173, 180, 192,
197–199, 204, 207, 212–213

L

lament, 28, 30, 44–50, 52–53, 55–58, 60–61,
64, 66–67, 74, 78–81, 84, 88, 93–94,
97, 99, 101–112, 115–118, 120–122, 124,
132–135, 139–140, 149, 157, 167, 171, 182,
186–187
Lamentations, 137, 147–157
life, 7, 18, 43, 47, 50–51, 56, 58, 65, 71–74,
76–78, 83, 90, 92–95, 97–101, 103–112,
114–115, 121, 123, 126–127, 132, 134–137,
140, 143, 153–154, 159, 161–162,
184, 187, 190
Luther, 113–115, 124

M

Moses, 10–23, 48, 52, 61–62, 70, 75, 94, 106,
177–178, 206
multiple voices, 155–156

N

Nehemiah Memorial, 180, 182–185,
187–192
Nehemiah, 57, 118, 175–193
Numbers, 14, 8, 17–18, 21, 191

P

penitence, 44, 46, 49, 52, 64, 113–116, 118,
120, 122, 124, 126–127, 162, 164–167,
170–171, 173, 180, 186, 197–201, 205,
207–208, 210–211, 213
petition, 22, 33, 35–36, 39–40, 58, 64,
67–69, 79–80, 83, 93, 101–104, 106,
108, 110, 112–113, 116–118, 120–122,
126–127, 133, 149, 166–169, 171,
173, 182, 185, 187, 189, 202, 204
post-exilic, 52, 60, 65, 88, 175, 178, 186,
188–190, 192, 196, 208, 213
praise, 45–46, 50, 52, 56, 59, 64, 87–101, 108,
110, 117, 120–121, 125, 131–132, 135, 162,
169, 179–180, 183–186, 189, 197–203,
208–211, 213
prayer passages, 148, 150, 155–157
prayer, 7–14, 16, 18, 20–23, 25–76, 78–85,
87–88, 90, 92–94, 96–104, 106–113,
115–118, 120–122, 126, 129–134, 136,
138–142, 144–145, 147–157, 159–173,
175–176, 178–184, 186–188, 190,
192–193, 195–210, 212–213
prayers of penitence, 113–114, 116, 118, 120,
122, 124, 126, 166, 171
prayers of praise, 64, 197
presence, 10, 12–13, 16–19, 21, 23, 25–26, 36,
38, 49, 52, 55, 59, 63, 65, 80, 92, 95,
97–98, 103–106, 111–112, 125, 130–131,
142, 154, 161, 163, 167, 172, 182, 184, 190,
196, 200, 208–209, 213
protest, 61, 67, 77, 99, 134, 141, 154
Psalm 32, 115–116, 118–121, 127
Psalm 51, 97, 104, 114, 116, 118–121, 125, 127
Psalms, 28, 36, 48, 60, 70, 72–73, 79, 84,
87–102, 104, 106–122, 124, 126–127,
129, 131, 133–134, 136, 139, 145, 167,
170, 176, 184, 186–189, 191, 195, 198,
208–209
public, 33–34, 38–39, 42, 50, 93–96,
99, 101, 180

R

relationship, 8, 10–12, 18, 20–23, 32, 35–37,
40, 47, 53–54, 57, 59–61, 65, 68, 70,
74–76, 78, 85, 91–92, 94, 99, 106, 112,
117, 149–150, 153, 159, 161, 171, 209, 213
Revelation/revelation, 17, 19–21, 81, 84, 139,
175–176, 179, 185–186, 189, 192

S

salvation, 28, 30, 44–48, 51, 54, 59, 71, 73,
91, 97, 100, 106, 108, 122, 124–125,
185–186, 188–189, 192–193
Samuel, 25–34, 36–38, 41–42, 48, 62, 130,
197–199
speech, 13–14, 30, 32, 67, 79, 102, 132–143
struggle, 54, 106, 112, 132, 170
subversion, 141
suffering, 46, 48, 57, 91, 94, 102, 104–105,
107–112, 117, 119, 123–124, 127, 131, 133,
141, 144, 151, 153, 166
supplication, 44–45, 49, 51–52, 54, 56,
93–94, 169, 207

T

tension, 38, 60, 112, 131–132, 134, 144, 189
thanksgiving, 28, 30–31, 33, 35–36, 42,
44–46, 49–51, 64, 69, 72–73, 88,
90, 93, 95–98, 104, 115–116, 119, 180,
183–187, 198, 200, 208–210, 213
theology, 7–8, 11, 25, 41–44, 49, 52, 54, 58,
60, 63, 78, 87, 94, 101, 113, 127, 129, 147,
152, 157, 159, 161, 163–164, 170–171, 175,
185–186, 188, 192, 195, 207
transformation, 63, 72, 84–85, 177, 196
trauma, 104, 160

V

versions, 74, 147, 150, 152, 155–157, 201

W

worship, 7–8, 31, 37–38, 41, 43, 47, 64, 66,
68–69, 71, 77, 87–90, 92–94, 96–101,
107, 109, 111–112, 133, 148, 159–163,
169–171, 182, 210, 212–213

Y

YHWH, 8, 25–26, 28–41, 44–62, 70–71,
78–80, 83, 89–98, 102–103, 105–107,
130–131, 137, 141–145, 148–157, 159,
161, 163–164, 167–170, 180, 189, 196,
198–200, 202–213

Biblical Theology of prayer in the Old Testament presents a study of astonishing depth and ambition in a society where prayer is too frequently understood in a narrow manner. It attempts to transform our thinking about meaning, language, ethics and religion by presenting holistic, interrelated, relational and limitless outlooks on prayer. It challenges many of our presumptions and lays out an utterly reimagined way of looking at prayer.

This well-written scholarly book is a testament to the tremendous intellectual effort of Albert J Coetsee, Francois P Viljoen and the contributing chapter authors, expended in carefully considering the seriousness of prayer. The bold scope is impressive and succeeds with a valid result: a unique work that belongs beside history's most significant. The scholars' arguments are admirably presented in an approachable manner and provide something to think about, and scholars and academics interested in this field will greatly benefit from this book.

When it comes to our presence and familiarity with the subject of prayer in the Old Testament, the authors explain it well. The authors open the door to the whole reality of prayer, which we will remember whilst engaging with this book.

Dr Doniwen Pietersen, Department of Old and New Testament Studies, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

Prayer literature forms an integral part of the Old Testament. Unfortunately, the Biblical Theology of prayer was neglected in the past. This edited collection, written by several South African and international scholars, therefore makes a major contribution to the Biblical Theology of prayer. Most prayer books focus on the Psalm; however, this excellent book covers the entire Old Testament, from the Pentateuch to Chronicles. It emphasises that prayer plays a crucial role in the covenant relationship between God and his people, similar to how the Bible portrays different people (from women to kings) communicating with God under other circumstances.

This book is of significant value to scholars. It will inspire scholars to think about prayer and use the Bible as the major 'prayer handbook' in their spiritual lives.

Dr Daniel O'Kennedy, Department of Old and New Testament, Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa



Open access at
<https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2023.BK417>



ISBN: 978-1-77995-272-1