

# A Study of Psalm 90

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Summary

The primary purpose of this dissertation is to define the function of Psalm 90 and its relationship with regard to adjacent psalms. Keeping this purpose in mind, the dissertation is composed of two main parts. The first part deals with textual notes, structural analysis, the date of the psalm and the possible situation it arose from, and then an attempt is made about the function of the psalm. Concerning the structural analysis, this study reveals that the psalm forms a unity in contrast to the views of Müller and Zenger who have argued for the division of the psalm into two parts.

The function that the psalm has within itself is to appeal to Yahweh to intervene in the dilemma the psalmist was facing in the exilic or post-exilic situation. However, since the psalm itself does not hint at any clue as to what the actual situation for the appeal was, the study is extended to the examination of the canonical perspective with regard to adjacent Psalms 89 and 91. This consists of the second part, and here Psalm 90 is compared to Psalms 89 and 91 in terms of lexical, thematic, and structural aspects. The study of this part shows that Psalm 90 forms close links with the

lament section of Psalm 89 (vv. 39-51) as well as Psalm 91, and the conclusion suggests that Psalm 90 should be interpreted in the light of Psalm 89, thus reflecting the destruction of the Davidic dynasty described in Psalm 89. Concerning the relationship between Psalms 90 and 91, the latter serves as an answer to the former in order to persuade the readers that Yahweh is a refuge to those who seek security and protection from him.

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I declare that "A Study of Psalm 90" is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



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## Chapter I

### I. Introduction

It is likely that Psalm 90 is a communal lament with elements of prayer which reflect the post-exilic situations the communities of faith were facing (Tate 1990:438, 445; cf. Kraus 1989:214-215). On this presupposition, our main concern in this dissertation is to define the function of Psalm 90 and its relationship with regard to adjacent psalms. Keeping this purpose in mind, the first part of this dissertation will deal with textual notes and focus on the structural analysis of the text which is achieved by the use of the text-immanent approach. This analysis leads us to clarify the ideas of the psalm and to see that the psalm forms a unity, which is in contrast to the views of some scholars who have divided it into two independent parts (for example, vv. 1-12 and 13-17).<sup>1</sup> After this analysis we shall discuss the date of the psalm and the possible situation it arose from, and then we shall attempt to define the function of the psalm as an appeal to Yahweh to intervene in the dilemma the psalmist was experiencing. However, since the psalm itself does not provide clear indications as to what the actual situation for the appeal was, our study will be extended to the examination of the canonical perspective with regard to the adjacent

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<sup>1</sup> Müller (1984:267-268) and Zenger (1994:153) argue for the division of the psalm into two parts.

psalms, namely Psalms 89 and 91. The study of Psalm 90 in connection with the adjacent psalms is based on Wilson's (1985:215; 1986:90-91) thesis that Book IV of the Psalter answers Book III of the Psalter, that is, Psalm 90 answers the questions raised by Psalm 89. Since it is impossible in this dissertation to deal with all the relationships of Psalm 90 to other psalms like Psalms 92, 93, 94, 95, our study is limited to the relationship of Psalm 90 to Psalms 89 and 91.

The study of Psalm 90 with respect to its relationship to the adjacent psalms will be achieved by comparing the psalm with the other two psalms in terms of lexical, thematic and structural aspects (in Chapter III the method to be pursued will be defined). In this study we presuppose that Psalm 90 can be read in continuation of Psalm 89 and Psalm 91 also in continuation of Psalm 90. When these psalms are read as a text, they not only bear certain messages which are not found in the contents of an individual psalm, but they also shed light on understanding each of the psalms. For example, the text in Psalm 90 does not hint at any clues to the historical motivation for the prayer in Psalm 90:7ff, but when it is interpreted along with Psalm 89, light may be shed towards a better understanding of the text.

At the conclusion of this dissertation we shall summarize the petitionary contents of Psalm 90 from the discussions of Chapter II in the light of the contents of Psalms 89 and 91.

## Chapter II

### 1. The text-immanent approach

Various exegetical methods have been used to comprehend the written texts of the Old Testament. Generally speaking, there are two main streams with regard to methodological approaches. One is to concentrate on the final form of the text, being concerned with investigating the significance of the work as a whole. The other is to view the book as a collection of disparate elements, each of which must be singled out and considered individually as to its significance (Wilson 1985:1). In South Africa these two approaches became known under the terms *synchronic* or *diachronic* methods (see Le Roux 1989:385, 386).

In this dissertation the approach that I am going to use primarily in reading the text, is the text-immanent method of exegesis which can be classified as the synchronic approach. Of course, this approach is not without criticism. Like any other method, it also contains both weaknesses and strengths. One of weaknesses may be "the lack of overall theoretical scrutiny" (Nel 1989:67). Moreover, a text originates in history and reflects historical perspectives, but the approach is primarily concerned with the text accepted in its final biblical form, though it does not totally ignore the historical dimension of the text.

Despite certain weaknesses of the approach, however, there are of course certain strengths in its use (see Loader 1991:41).

The use of the text-immanent approach does not mean to solve all problems of interpretation which a text contains. It is one of various methods used in order to understand the context of a given text. Loader (1991:33) aptly defines it as follows:

The word 'immanent' means 'inherent', so that when we speak of an 'immanent' reading it means that we consider only that which is given in or intrinsic to the text. We pay no attention to things outside the actual text, such as what the author had in mind ... or the things the words refer to ... Neither do we relate it to other texts (which one could call an *intertextual* reading). The text is read as an independent entity, approached as a system of *related* elements. The elements in the network of the text refer to one another, resulting in a particular *interrelationship*.

As Loader noted, the text-immanent approach is mainly concerned with exploring the meaning of the text within its present context. Thus, attention is rather paid to morphological, syntactic, stylistic and semantic aspects than to the process of the historical development of the text. Because the approach itself is limited to this tendency, it seems more advisable not to exclude the uses of other methods. However, we will primarily concentrate on the structural analysis of Psalm 90 and the text-immanent exegesis can be regarded as a suitable

tool for such a purpose. However, in the process of discussion we will include some historical perspectives where they are necessary.

## 2. Text

Psalm 90:1-17

- 1 חֲפֹלָה לְמַשָּׁה אִישֵּׁךְ אֱלֹהִים אָרֶן מַעֲוָן אֲפָה דִּיְתָ לְנָה בָּהָר וְדָר
- 2 בְּטֶרֶם שָׁרִים נָלַד וְחַולֵל אָרֶץ וְמַבֵּל וְמַעוֹלָם עֲרֵ-עוֹלָם אֲפָה אֵל
- 3 שָׁבָב אָנוֹשׁ עֲרֵ-דָקָא וְהָאָמָר שְׁיוֹבָה בְּנֵי-אָרָם:
- 4 כִּי אֶלְרַ שְׁנִים בְּעֵינֵיךְ כִּי יוֹם אַחֲמָל כִּי יַעֲבֵר וְאַשְׁמָרָה בְּלִילָה
- 5 זְרַקְתָּם שְׁנָה וְהִיוּ בְּבָקָר כְּחַצִּיר נְחַלֵּף
- 6 בְּבָקָר צִיא וְחַלֵּף לְעַכְבָּר יְמֻלָּל וְנַבְשָׁ
- 7 כְּרַכְלִינוּ בְּאָפָּךְ וּבְחַמְחָבָּב נְבָקְלָנוּ:
- 8 שְׁהָה עֲנוֹתָינוּ לְגַדְעָן עַלְמָנוּ לְמָאוֹר פְּנֵיכְ
- 9 כִּי כְּלִימָנָנוּ פָּנוּ בְּעַבְרָתָן כְּלִינוּ שְׁנָינוּ כְּמַרְדָּקָה
- 10 נְמִידָשָׂנוּתָינוּ כְּהָם שְׁבָעִים שָׁנָה וְאָם בְּגִבּוֹרָת שְׁמָרָנִים שָׁנָה וְרַקְבָּם עַמְלָ  
נָאָנוּ כְּרַנְנוּ חִישׁ וְנַעֲפָה
- 11 מִידָ-וְהָעָז עֹז אָפָּנָ וְכִירָא הָעָז עַבְרָתָן
- 12 לְמָנוֹה נְמִינָנוּ פָּנָה הָוָדָע וְנַבָּא לְבָבָ חַכְמָה
- 13 שְׁוָבָה וְחָנָה עֲדַ-מְטָה וְחַגָּם עַל-עַבְרִיךְ
- 14 שְׁבָעָנוּ בְּבָקָר סְסָרָן וְנַרְגָּה וְנַשְּׁמָמָה בְּכְלִימָנָנוּ
- 15 שְׁמָחָנָנוּ כִּימָה עֲנִיקָנוּ שְׁנוֹתָה בְּאִינוּ רַעָה
- 16 וְנַאֲהָ אַל-עַבְרִיךְ פְּאַלְגָּן וְנַרְגָּב עַל-קְנִים
- 17 וְיַחַד נָעַם אָרֶן אַלְקָנָנוּ עַלְיָנוּ וְמַעֲשָׂה נְרִינוּ בְּוֹנָה עַלְיָנוּ  
וְמַעֲשָׂה נְרִינוּ פְּוֹנָנָה

### 3. Textual notes

Verse 1b. The word יְהוָה has traditionally been translated as “dwelling place” (KJV; RSV). However, some Hebrew manuscripts read יְמֻנוֹן, “refuge,” which is also supported by the reading of the Septuagint “καταφυρη.” Kissane (1954:102) reads מַעֲרָה for יְמֻנוֹן, while Kraus (1989:213), arguing that מַעֲרָה is used often in the Old Testament for the hiding place of animals (Nah 2:12; Jer 9:10; 10:22; 49:33; 51:85) and for the dwelling place of God (Deut 26:15; Jer 25:30; Ps 68:5), retains the Masoretic text, that is, יְמֻנוֹן. In contrast to this, Dahood (1968:172, 322) translates יְמֻנוֹן as “our mainstay,” arguing that it is derived from the Arabic *ana* meaning “to aid/ give succor,” and Goitein (1965:52-53) suggests that יְמֻנוֹן, somehow linked with the root יְמִין, “sin,” can be translated as “an occasion for/ a reminder of sin.” Despite these various suggestions regarding the word יְמֻנוֹן, however, nothing definitive has been suggested against it. It is likely that the Masoretic text should be retained, since there is enough evidence supporting its use as “the dwelling place of God” (Deut 26:15; Jer 25:30; Ps 68:6; 2 Chr 36:15). Despite this fact, it is important to remember that יְמֻנוֹן and מַעֲרָה can be interchanged in the Hebrew Bible, as Hugger (1971:45) notes. Indeed, they occur in similar contexts, as the following instances show:

בָּרוּךְ לֵי לְצִפְרַתְמָעוֹז לְבֵית מִצְוֹתָה לְהֽוֹשִׁיעָנוּ Psalm 31:3b:

בָּרוּךְ לֵי לְצִפְרַת מָעוֹן לְבוֹא סְמִיד צִוִּים Psalm 71:3:

לְהֽוֹשִׁיעָנוּ כִּי־סֶלָעִי וּמִצְפָּחָתִי אֲפָה

בָּרוּךְ לֵי Psalms 31:3b and 71:3 both start with the same phrase

לְצִפְרַתְמָעוֹז and share four words (צִפְרָה, צִפְרַת, בָּרוּךְ, and יִשְׁעָה) in

common, but the מָעוֹן in the phrase לְצִפְרַתְמָעוֹז of the former is

interchanged with the מָעוֹן in the phrase לְצִפְרַת מָעוֹן of the latter. In

addition, Psalms 27:1 and 37:39 repeat the root יִשְׁעָה in common, but

the former has the word וְנִשְׁעָן while the latter holds the word נִשְׁעָן וְנִ

The instances shown above indicate that the words נִשְׁעָן וְנִשְׁעָן can

be exchanged to each other, thus implying that the meanings of the words may also be interchanged.

Verse 2a. The Masoretic text points to the second verb חָכַל as a consecutive polel imperfect לְחוּכָל, but the ancient versions read polal (thus, the change of the final sérê into a patah, passive) for the polel of the Mosoretic text. Kissane (1954:102), Vawter (1975:460), Dahood (1968:323), and Tate (1990:432) take this polal alternative, but Anderson (1972:650) and Kraus (1989:212) hold to the Masoretic text. When the Masoretic text is retained, the word אָתָּה is taken as the subject of the verb. In this case the old conception of “mother earth” is maintained. It is likely to render the phrase in favour of the earth

giving rise to mountains, thus in keeping with Anderson and Kraus. Anderson (1972:650) correctly notes that God ultimately played a creative role in the formation of the mountains (cf. Gen 1:11, 20).

Verse 3. In v. 3 the function of the verb forms בָשַׂר and וְתֹאכֵל has caused difficulties. The וְתֹאכֵל with an imperfect waw-consecutive forms an awkward continuation of the jussive בָשַׂר. Dahood (1968:323) transposes לֹא from v. 2 and vocalizes it as negative לֹא, thus reading “Do not send man back ... nor say ...,” while Müller (1984:271) translates them as past tense, in the sense of God’s ordering man to die: “You let man return to die.” However, as Tate (1990:432) notes, a more likely solution is to take the imperfect of שׁוּב and אמר as iterative.

Verse 5. Verse 5 has caused numerous textual difficulties. In this verse man is described with three quite different images (wash away; sleep and grass), but it is not clear why people who have been “washed away” (מִמְּנָה) to the “sleep” of death (נֶגֶשׁ) become like “grass that passes away in the morning” (בְּבֹקֶר קָחָצֵיר נֶגֶשׁ). Owing to this difficulty, many proposals for emendation have been suggested by scholars. Concerning the interpretation of this verse, scholars have posed the following questions: What is the meaning of זֶר ?; What is the antecedent of the suffix-ם in the word מִמְּנָה ?; What is the function of the imperfect נֶגֶשׁ ?; What exactly is the sense of the final

verb זָרַם ?

Here, the views of several scholars concerning the questions posed above should be discussed. Regarding the meaning of זָרַם, Thomas (1968:267-268) transfers the final letter of בְּזָרַם to the beginning of the word, thus making it מִזְרָמָה and reads the phrase as follows: “from emission of seed in sleep (=concubitus) are they.” Whitley (1982:555-557) reads בְּזָרַם זָרָם as a noun “their offspring,” seeing the antecedent of the suffix-ם as the sons of men in v. 3. Müller (1984:272) and Vawter (1975:460) both translate בְּזָרַם זָרָם as “cut them off,” based on the Arabic “Zarima” and “Zarama” and read together with v. 4c: “like a watch in the night you cut them off in sleep.” On the other hand, Dahood (1968:324) understands the verb (בְּזָרַם) as conditional without an indicator, and translates it as “plunk,” while Kraus reads it as “you see them,” assuming the change of the letter בְּ in בְּזָרַם into וְ, thus forming the word בְּזָרָם.

There have also been various suggestions among scholars regarding the meaning of the נֶשֶׁב (“sleep”). For example, Whitley (1982:555-557) changes נֶשֶׁב to נֶשֶׁבֶת (feminine participle from נֶשֶׁב “change”) which means that man is subject to change, in contrast to God’s immutability. Thus, he translates the verse as follows: “Their offspring changeth, as grass undergoing change.” In contrast to this,

Dahood (1968:324) takes פָּנָשׁ as an accusative of time denoting the period of sleep and reads: "If you plunk them at night." The most attractive suggestion, however, is to repoint פָּנָשׁ to פָּנָשׁ, assuming haplography and a wrong vocalization, and to read פָּנָשׁ פָּנָשׁ, "year by year" (Kraus 1989:213; Westermann 1964:347, 1989:156). This suggestion seems attractive in that שְׁנִים שְׁנִים in v. 4 and שְׁנָה שְׁנָה in v. 5 are paralleled.

The meaning of the word נַעֲלֵף has also been interpreted in various ways. Dahood (1968:324) sees in the expression נַעֲלֵף בְּחִזֵּיר a relative clause without the corresponding pronoun and reads נַעֲלֵף as "to cut," thus "like cut grass." Vawter (1975:460) takes the verb נַעֲלֵף as being equivalent to an adjective, and נַעֲלֵף בְּחִזֵּיר as "like drying grass." Kissane (1954:101) and Kraus (1989:212) interpret the verb as "grow," while Driver (1968:177) deletes both the verb in v. 5 and the word בְּבָקָר in the beginning of v. 6, in order to create a metre of 3+3 in both passages.

The diversity of opinions shown above indicates that there is no satisfactory solution to this puzzling verse. Despite the textual uncertainty, however, possible solutions should be suggested. We here accept the views of certain scholars regarding the interpretation of v. 5.

The translation of מֶרֶא must be retained, as it stands, because the

meaning “pour forth”/ “flood” / “ejaculate” is well-fitted with the text (Tsevat 1985:115-117; Booij 1987:393-396; Tate 1990:433). Concerning the antecedent of the suffix-**Q** in the word **תְּמִימָנִים**, the “thousand years” in v.4 may be a possible antecedent, but a more likely view to take would be that the reference is to “sons of men” in v. 3. Along with this, the Qal imperfect 3 male plural of **שָׁמַן** should also be understood as referring to the “sons of men” in v. 3.

Concerning the meaning of the word **נִלְוָד**, Booij (1987:393-396) has suggested a likely interpretation. According to him, “sleep” in v. 5 is not just “every night sleep,” but “sleep” with the connotation of “death,” or else a sleep which makes man vulnerable (cf. Tsevat 1985:115-117). He (1987:395) explains as follows:

... by the use of traditional imagery, 90:5a indicates utter human helplessness and liability to death as willed by God. There is probably an associative connection between this element and the end of v. 4 ('night-watch').

Thus, it is possible to retain the meaning of “sleep” as it stands. In fact, Psalm 76:6-7 and Nahum 3:18 describe the death of enemies as “sleep,” and **נִלְוָד** is also used further in Job 14:12 and Jeremiah 51:39 and 57 in the sense of death.

The **נִלְבָּנָה** with a Qal imperfect third male singular may have the meaning of “flourish / renew,” but it does not fit well with the text.

A probable interpretation is to translate the word so that it carries the idea of “fading / passing /withering,” assuming a relative clause that can be used as a substitute for an adjective (Schreiner 1978:84). Since v. 5 describes the transience of human beings with the imagery of grass that passes away, this interpretation makes sense. On the whole, v. 5 can be divided into two stichs, and we can read v. 5a and 5b as protasis and apodosis respectively (Booij 1987:396; Tate 1990:434), assuming that וְיַהֲיَ is read at the beginning of v. 5. Thus, one may translate v. 5 as follows: “When you pour sleep over them, they become like grass which is not lasting in the morning.”

Despite the explanations given above concerning the interpretation of v. 5, the meaning of the verse may still be unclear. However, the interpretation of Psalm 90 as a whole is totally unaffected by the uncertainty of v. 5. It is clear that v. 5 refers to the transience of human life.

#### 4. Structural analysis

Apart from the title, on the whole, the psalm consists of two stanzas (1-12 and 13-17), the first of which has four strophes (vv. 1-2, 3-6, 7-10, and 11-12), the second of which forms one strophe (13-17).

The first strophe of the first stanza, vv. 1-2, constitutes an introduction to the entire psalm. God's name יְהֹוָה in v. 1 and v. 17 forms an inclusio, embracing the entire psalm. The literary device of linking the beginning with the end is further observed when we understand that the word מַעֲוָד in v. 1 is reversed in v. 17 as דָעַת with identical consonants. The former refers to a timeless past, while the latter refers to the future (Magonet 1994:153-154). Thus, the opening of the psalm speaks of God's help in the past, on the basis of which his people have found confidence, while the end projects this experience ahead into the future, affirming that God may restore the joy of his people's salvation.

It is the thematic unity that binds vv.1b-2. These verses contrast God's time with the time of human beings. The concept of the transience of human beings is implied in such words as בָּרוּךְ הוּא, בָּרוּךְ הוּא, in vv. 1-2, while the phrase "from everlasting to everlasting" (מִעוּלָם עַד-עוּלָם) reveals God's time which encompasses past, present, and future. This theme of the transitoriness of man expressed in

contrast to God continues throughout the psalm.

Verse 2a and 2b form an extension that explains the statement in 1b, in turn explaining the transience of human beings. The verbs בָּרַךְ in 2a and תִּהְרַלֵּל in 2b are the terms used for birth pangs, and thus both correspond to the imagery of birth. Also, the word בְּתִרְמָם serves both 2a and 2b. The use of the birth imagery when describing creation, emphasizes the transitoriness of human beings by saying that though the mountains and the world belong to the permanent features of creation, they had a beginning, a physical birth (Magonet 1994:154). In contrast to this, God's time is "from everlasting to everlasting" (מִעוּדָם עַד־עוּדָם). The conjunction וְ at the beginning of 2c bearing an explicative meaning ('even') serves to emphasize a strong contrast between the transcendence of God and the transience of human beings. The following chiastic structure shows the thought of vv. 1b-2 clearly:

A: אֱלֹהִים (God)

B: בָּרוּךְ בָּרוּךְ (time)

C: הָרִים (space)

C': אָרֶץ וּמַבָּלָה (space)

B': מִעוּדָם עַד־עוּדָם (time)

A': אֱלֹהִים (God)

The above structure reveals that vv. 1-2 are surrounded by the divine God who encompasses time and space (McCann 1993:157). This

explains why the psalmist confesses God as “dwelling place” or “refuge” (גּוֹתָן). The eternal God who dwells beyond the generation of the earth and the world of man has been a basis of the psalmist’s confidence.

After the introduction to the thought of the whole psalm, the psalmist again returns to the theme of the human transitoriness in v. 3, while vv. 4-6 deal with the theme of the eternal God from his point of view. In v. 3 the term נֶפֶל and the phrase בְּנֵי אָדָם refer to the transitory man and in vv. 4-6 the transcendence of God is implied in the following terms מִזְבֵּחַ אֲלֵף שְׁנִים (v. 4), אַחֲמָול בְּלִילָה (v. 4), עַבְדָּבָר בְּקָר (vv. 5, 6) and עַבְדָּבָר שְׁנִים (v. 6) which emphasize the transitoriness of human beings.

Verse 3 has two stichs, and the word שׁוֹבֵב occurring in the first stich is repeated in the second stich. Dahood (1968:323), Weiser (1979:597), and Kirkpatrick (1903:549) take the same verb בְּשֻׁבְבָשׁ in v. 3a and in 3b as a synonymous parallelism, by which the whole verse is understood as referring to man’s return to dust (death). This view is acceptable, since we find in Gen 3:19 and Ps 104:29 a synonymous parallelism in the use of both verbs.

The emphatic כִּי (Dahood 1968:324) at the beginning of v. 4 indicates the beginning of a new section. Its use at the beginning of v. 4 here serves to emphasize mankind’s mortality in v. 3 by contrasting

with the transcendence of God indicated in v. 4.

Verse 4 is closely linked with vv. 5-6 through poetic style. The comparative preposition **כִּי** ("like") occurring in vv. 4-5 and the appearance of the preposition **כִּי** in all three verses indicate a close connection between all three verses. Also, in v. 4 the psalmist refers to time by narrowing from "a thousand of years in God's sight" to a day (yesterday) to "a watch in the night" (Alter 1985:127). This theme of time is continued in vv. 5-6 where in v. 5 the "sleep" (**נַעֲמָה**) corresponds to the "night" (**לְבָנָה**) in v. 4 and the reference to "the morning" and "the evening" in 5-6 is reminiscent of "the day" (**יֹמָה**) mentioned in v. 4. In this way, a link between v. 4 and vv. 5-6 is established. Verses 5-6 form a chiastic structure, as the following shows:

V. 5a: 'sleep' (night)

V. 5b: 'morning'

V. 6a: 'morning'

V. 6b: 'evening'

Some exegetes distinguish v. 4 from vv. 5-6, suggesting that the former deals with the transcendence of God, while the latter deals with the transitory motif of human beings. However, it is more likely that vv. 4-6 should be read as a unity, which stresses the eternity of God.

In vv. 7-10 the psalmist changes focus from human mortality to

human misery. The sinner under God's wrath is described effectively by the use of the following terms: **כָּלִינוֹ** (v. 7a), **עַזְוַתִּינוֹ** (v. 7b), **עַזְוַתִּינוֹ** (v. 8a), **לְמַאֲוֵּר פְּנֵיכֶן** (v. 8b), **כָּמוֹדַהֲנָה** (v. 9a), **עַמְלָל** (v. 10b), **אָלָן** (v. 10b). The theme of mankind's fragile and brief span of life links these verses as a unity.

Verses 7-10 constitute the third strophe which is divided into two parts (vv. 7-8 and 9-10). Verses 7-8 refer to the miserable situation of man caused by God's wrath, while vv. 9-10 describe the reduction of human life that God's wrath and anger effect. The "we"-speaker as a subject dominating this strophe distinguishes it from the previous verses by referring to man in the third person. Verses 3-6 describe the situations of God and man in general, but vv. 7-10 deal with the suffering of "us" as brought about by God's wrath.

The conjunction **וְ** at the beginning of v. 7a also functions as emphatic (Dahood 1968:324), which indicates a new unit of thought.

The theme of transitory man is still continued in v. 7, since the terms "anger" and "wrath," which mean "heat" and "hot breath of the nostrils," are reminiscent of the image of the withering grass (v. 6) in hot weather (Alter 1985:127-128). Verse 7 refers to the transitoriness of man in the light of God's anger and wrath, while v. 8 describes the experience of the transitoriness through reference to human frailty and guilt.

Verse 7a and 7b are linked by means of a chiasm and v. 8a and 8b form a synonymous parallelism if we take the verb פָּעַל as serving both 8a and 8b. When taken together, vv. 7 and 8 mark a well-balanced structure in the case of considering only the pronouns:

V. 7a: We . . . your (anger)

V. 7b: Your (wrath) . . . we

V. 8a: You . . . our (iniquities)

V. 8b: Our (secret sins) . . . your (countenance)

The alternation of the first plural pronoun and the second person pronoun in these four stichs leads us to see vv. 7 and 8 as a unity. Through its parallelism v. 7 emphasizes God's anger and wrath, while v. 8 focuses on our sin. The relation between vv. 7 and 8 lies in the fact that it is human sins (v. 8) which provoke God's anger and wrath (v. 7).

The balance that has been found in vv. 7-8 is broken in v. 9, because the first plural pronoun as subject and object (our days, we, and our years) occurs three times and the second person pronoun (your wrath) as object only once. Verses 9-10 focus more specifically on the decline in the days and the years of transient man that God's wrath (vv. 7-8) effects. In vv. 7-8 the life of human beings under the wrath of God is portrayed with gerneral terms ("we are consumed"; "we are overwhelmed"), but in these verses the life, which is the result of the

judgement indicated in vv. 7-8, is described in a more concrete and specific manner (seventy years or eighty; toil and trouble).

The occurrence of the words “days” and “years” in vv. 9-10 which are reminiscent of vv. 4-6, separates vv. 9-10 from vv. 7-8 where there is no mention of time, but nevertheless vv. 9-10 are considered as an extension of the theme that is stated in vv. 7-8, because the former state the consequences of the judgement indicated in the latter, as the word “wrath” (**עָבֵד**) in v. 9 implies a continuation of v. 7.

Verse 9 starts with an emphatic **וְ** that signals the beginning of a new unity. The occurrence of the words “days” and “years” in both verses 9 and 10 marks a link. Verse 9 describes man under God’s wrath with metaphors of time (“all our days”, “our years”, v. 9) and v. 10 depicts the life of man marked by brevity (“seventy years or eighty”, v. 10a) and annoyance (“toil” and “trouble”, v. 10b).

In v. 9a “all our days” (**כָל־יְמִינֵנוּ**) is paralleled with “our years” (**שָׁנִינוּ**) in 9b and the expression “pass away” (**לֹא נִצְבַּא**) in 9a is balanced with the word **כְּלִינוּ** in 9b. Verse 10a and 10b are closely linked together, because they form a synthetic parallelism. The conjunction **וְ** at the beginning of v. 10b reinforces the statements made in v. 10a, and in v. 10c the third male plural suffix of **וְ** (**וְהָנָצַבְתָּ**) refers back to the subject of 10a and 10b, so that v. 10a-c is linked together. It is likely that the **וְ** in 10d should be taken as emphatic and that **שָׁנָה**

should be understood as adverbial, referring to the same subject as the verb **הַפְּעָל** (thus, “Indeed, rapidly disappearing we fly away”), as Müller (1984:275) has suggested. In this case the consecutive Qal imperfect plural of **הַפְּעָל** refers to the plural subject of vv. 9-10c. Thus, vv. 9-10 are tied together by the use of the same subject and the same thematic unity.

Verses 11-12 form transitional verses which serve to conclude the previous part (vv. 3-10) and to open the following part (vv. 13-17). The words **תְּהִלָּה** and **עֲבֹרֶת** found in v. 11 mark a link with the preceding verses (especially, v. 7 and v. 9), while the term “our days” (**יְמֵינוּ**) in v. 12 recalls vv. 9-10 as well as vv. 4-6, also referring forward to v. 14 where the same word recurs. Thus, both motifs, God’s wrath and the transitoriness of man, mentioned in the previous verses, once again occur in these verses as a summary statement. Besides, the plea (“teach us so that we may get a heart of wisdom”) that begins in v. 12, echoes the series of petitions found in vv. 13-16.

Verses 11-12 mark the transformation from the situation of distress to the hopeful prayer for its reversal. Verse 12 forms a plea in which the psalmist asks God to make him realize how short life is, in order to obtain a heart of wisdom. The wisdom vocabulary “consider” (**וְלֹא**) in v. 11a and 12a binds these verses into a tight unity and sets them apart from the preceding verses and the following.

Verses 13-17 form the second stanza in which we find the “we-you” form of address with petitions for God’s compassion.

Verses 13-16 form a stylistic unit. First of all, the word “servants” (בָּנִים) in v. 13 again occurs in v. 16, thus forming an inclusio between these verses. Verse 14 is linked to v. 15 by the use of the same words נְמַנֵּה and מִזְבֵּחַ. Also, v. 15 is linked with v. 16 by the occurrence of the word נָאֹת in both verses. These verses, vv. 13-16, also constitute a chiastic structure if we consider only the following words:

V. 13a: Servants

V. 14b: Us

V. 15b: Us

V. 16a: Servants

In addition, there is another stylistic unity. The first two verses, 13-14, have four stichs. Of them, the first three have an imperative (הֲבָרֵךְ, מְלַא קֶדֶשׁ, שְׁלַמֵּן אֱנוֹנָה) and the last stich ends with a cohortative (הֲלַל כְּבוֹדְךָ, הֲלַל מְנֻמְדָּךָ). Similarly, vv. 15-16, consisting of four stichs, start with an imperative (וְלַל תְּמִימָה) and end with a jussive (נָאֹת). Through these stylistic structures mentioned above, the psalmist emphasizes God’s mercy on his servants (us). The emphasis on God’s mercy in these verses is also found in the use of the word בְּנֵשׁ in v. 13 which has already been employed in v. 3. In the latter, the word indicates the

distance between God and human beings, but here in v. 13 it is used for God's return (or mercy) to human beings to bridge the distance between God and human beings. This distance between creature and creator can only be overcome by grace (Van der Toorn 1985:98). Tate (1990:436) notes that when the niphil imperative of בְּנֵי is used with the preposition בְּ, as shown in v. 13, it means "to change one's mind about something planned" (Exod 32:12, 14; Jer 18:8, 10; Jonah 3:10; Job 42:6). It is quite obvious that v. 13 is referring to the change of God's mind about his servants.

Verses 13-16 not only form a unity, but are also linked with the previous verses. In vv. 5-6 human beings are described as grass withering in the morning, but in v. 14 the psalmist prays to God to "satisfy us in the morning." Also, in v. 9 all the days of the people pass away under God's wrath, but in v. 14 the psalmist prays that they may enjoy all their days. In the same way, v. 15 corresponds to v. 12, since the prayer "to number our days" in v. 12 finds its counterpart in the prayer in v. 15 "make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us." In addition, the children in v. 16 are reminiscent of the "children of men" (בָּנִים־אָדָם) in v. 3.

Verse 17, as indicated earlier, has a link with v. 1 through the occurrence of the same word in both verses, thus functioning as a conclusion to the whole psalm. In addition, the word "work" (עֲמָלָק)

in v. 17 creates a tie with v. 16, though an alternative term (**לְעָזֶב**) is used in v. 16. Also, both verses use the same subjects which suggest an additional link. Furthermore, the word “favours” corresponds to the word “love” in v. 14. On the whole, v. 17 reflects a hopeful future which will be changed by God’s favour which is opposed to the wrath of God summarized in v. 11. Alter (1985:129) notes an important function of the word **לְעָזֶב** in v. 17 in connection with other verses:

The special force of the reiteration of this verb at the end of Psalm 90 must be felt as a reversal of the imagery of withering grass, sighs, things burnt up by God’s wrath, and ... humanity flooded or engulfed by sleep.

To summarize, the psalm is divided into the two stanzas (vv. 1-12 and 13-17) and the first stanza consists of four strophes (vv. 1-2, 3-6, 7-10, and 11-12), while the second consists of one strophe (vv. 13-17). Some exegetes classify the psalm as two separate compositions (vv. 1-12 and 13-17) (for instance, Müller 1984:267-268; Zenger 1994:153). However, as we have seen so far, the psalm constitutes a coherent unity through the recurrent images and the structure (cf. Schreiner 1978:80-90; Auffret 1980:262-76). The theme of the transitoriness of man runs through vv. 1-12 and vv. 13-17 respond to that with a series of petitions by emphasizing that the problem can be overcome only by God’s grace.

The fact that several key words (for instance, “return” in vv. 3, 13; “morning,” in vv. 5, 6, 14; “us” or “we,” in vv. 7-10, 14-15; “day,” in vv. 4, 9-10, 12, 14-15; “the Lord,” in vv. 1, 17) in vv. 13-17 also occur in vv. 1-12, marks a clear link between them. Furthermore, the obvious inclusio at the beginning and the end, as well as the correspondence of v. 3 to v. 13, using different meanings of the verb (בָּשׁ) all confirm the coherent structure of the psalm.

Verses 1b-2 contain a prayer addressed to God with the plural speech of the “we-you” form, vv. 3-11 deal with life’s transience as a general condition of humankind, and v. 12 ends with a petition. Verses 13-17 form a series of petitions and prayers to God. Thus, the psalm shows mixed types which are not easily recognizable.

## 5. Genre of Psalm 90

With regard to the genre of Psalm 90, Gunkel (1933:71, 224) classifies vv. 13-17 as community lament and vv. 1-2 as having elements of the hymn, while Westermann (1989:156-165) categorizes it as a communal lament, noting that vv. 1-2 belong to the psalms of trust and vv. 3-12 are a lament on transitoriness with an element of the individual lament. Kraus (1989:214-216) understands the psalm as a community lament, pointing out hymnic elements in vv. 1-4, and Mowinckel (1962a:221-222) interprets the psalm as a national lament reflecting the national distress and disasters of post-monarchical Judaism.

Psalm 90 seems to belong, as a whole, to the genre of the community lament. The introductory section (vv. 1-2), with the title “a prayer of Moses,” recalls a cry for help, and the question “how long” (‘אָמַרְתִּי) in v. 13 and a series of the petitions occurring in vv. 12-17 are obviously reminiscent of lament psalms. Moreover, the contrast of human life to God, the confession of sins and the appeal to God’s mercy - all these features characterize the psalm as a lament. Community concerns are also predominant. In the introductory section, the speaker identifies himself with “us”, and in vv. 7-17 the “we”-form of address is continued. Thus, it is difficult to deny the communal

characteristics manifest in the psalm. It is therefore clear that the psalm constitutes a community lament.

## 6. Date of Psalm 90

Concerning the date of the psalm, there has been no agreement among scholars. For example, Dahood (1968:322) prefers an early date (ninth-century), emphasizing its resemblances to Deut 32, Gen 2:4 and 3:19. On the other hand, Kissane (1954:100) suggests an exilic origin, pointing out its similarity to Psalm 102, and similarly Briggs & Briggs (1969:272) dates it to the late Exile, deducing it from the fact that Psalm 90 resembles the contents of Ezekiel 11:16-20 and Isaiah 40:2.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the diverse opinions on the date of the psalm, however, the ascription of its origin to the post-exilic period seems more plausible, since the psalm resembles many tendencies of the post-exilic texts. For instance, Von Rad (1980:210-223) points out that the psalm exhibits the lack of reference to the divine acts of salvation in the history of the Israelites, the lack of which is also characteristic of wisdom literatures, and then he suggests that the psalm belongs to the same intellectual and theological situation as Ecclesiastes, which reflect the post-exilic period. Similarly Vawter (1975:460-470) also claims that the psalm resembles many elements of the wisdom tradition developed in the post-exilic period, for example, in Wisdom of Solomon 9:1-18

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<sup>2</sup> Briggs (1969:272) notes as follows: “The thought of God as the dwelling place of His people resembles Ez 11:16-20, where He is their sanctuary during the Exile. The estimate of proportion between the affliction and the gladness is in accordance with Is 40:2.”

and 15:1-3.

In addition to the support of Von Rad and Vawter for its origin in the post-exilic period, a close examination of the psalm itself suggests some clues to a post-exilic date or at least the exilic period. First of all, the term **עָבֶד** “servant” is frequently found in the post-exilic texts (Deut 32:43; Isa 56:6; 65:8-9; 65:13-15; 66:14; cf. Mal 3:18; 3:22; Ps 34:23; 69:37; 79:2; 105:25; 123:2; 134:1; 135:1)<sup>3</sup> and as Van der Ploeg (1963:150) noted, the combination of **בָּרוּךְ נָזֵר** also is frequently found in exilic and post-exilic texts (cf. Pss 10:6; 33:11; 49:12; Isa 13:20; 34:17; 58:12; 60:15; 61:4; Jer 1:39; Joel 4:20; Prov 27:24). On the other hand, the life-span recorded in Psalm 90:10, “seventy or eighty years” does not fit in with that of Moses who lived for 120 years (Deut 34:7) and to whom the authorship is attributed in the title. According to Köhler (1956:42-46), “seventy” or “eighty” years were seldom the average life-span in the ancient world. Malamat (1982:217) has also noted that the reference to 70 years in the Old Testament may evoke the Mosaic scheme of divine retribution and it may also represent the years of suffering or judgement for the duration of national catastrophe (see also Carroll 1981:203-204 and Bedford 1995:71-94, esp. 75-86). These considerations seem to support

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<sup>3</sup> Tate (1990:438) points out that Psalm 90's use of the term “servants” as a designation for the Israelite community is a post-exilic practice.

the late date of the psalm. In fact, many scholars have supported the post-exilic date and likewise noted that the psalm may reflect the national suffering of that period (Anderson 1972:649; Vawter 1975:460-70; Von Rad 1980:221; Müller 1984:266-68; Kraus 1989:215; Krüger 1994:208-212; Tate 1990:445). For example, Aejmelaeus (1986:101) asserts that “most of the congregational complaint psalms are clearly conditioned by the national catastrophe of the Exile and thus datable to exilic or post-exilic times.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Brueggemann (1984:113) notes that in Psalm 90:13 "... ‘Have pity’ (דַּעַת), is the one used in Isa 40:1 for the ending of exile."

## 7. Situation

We have suggested above that Psalm 90 reflects the miserable condition of the Israelite community in the post-exilic period. This suggestion leads us to read the text against the broad background of a post-exilic situation and the text itself provides certain clues which make it possible for us to understand the post-exilic situations which have caused the difficulties of the Israelite communities.

As indicated earlier, vv. 1-2 deal with the theme of transitory man as compared to the eternity of God. Divine time is compared to that of man which belongs to passing generations. The expression “generation to generation” (*בָּדָר נֶדֶר*) covers the time of human generations in the past, but the phrase “everlasting to everlasting” (*עוֹלָם עַד-עוֹלָם*) refers to divine time which includes past, present and future. This contrast between the eternity of God and the transitoriness of man is reinforced even further by the use of the terminologies (*תַּהוֹלֵל, נִלְדוֹת*) describing the creation of the world and the earth (see above) by the birth metaphor. God was there as an active creator when the world and the earth were created. The birth imagery poetically functions to hint at the birth of humankind, which suggests the limitations of time that are imposed on humans in contrast to God, who is eternal. Instead of reviewing the salvation history which

consoled the Israelites, vv. 1b-2 focus on the thought of God's eternity which threatens to overwhelm the human beings who are transitory. This contrast between God and man at the beginning of the psalm emphasizes the human nature of transitoriness applicable to the distress of the post-exilic communities described in vv. 7-17. It is clear that in vv. 1-2 the form of address "you-we" are linked with vv. 7-17 where the speech of "we-you" is also contained and where vv. 7-10 describe the actual situation of the speaker in the text (Kissane 1954:104; Krüger 1994:201-203).<sup>5</sup> The fact that in vv. 1b-2 the sharp contrast between God and man may indirectly refer to the suffering of the post-exilic communities, is also confirmed by the use of the verb פָּנָא which is perfectum. Here the implication of the past tense is that God was always a refuge, but is no longer with us in the present (Kissane 1954:102; Krüger 1994:196-197). By contrasting God's prior grace to his current concealment, the psalmist indirectly points out the present dilemma which he is facing.

Verses 3-6 deal with human conditions in general. In these verses once again the eternity of God is contrasted to transient man. In face of God's eternal setting man's life is disintegrated into dust (death) (v. 3). In v. 3 the Hebrew alternative terms וְלִבָּנָה "man" and כָּלֹבֶד "man"

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<sup>5</sup> Krüger (1994:195-203) notes that the perfectum of the verb פָּנָא in v. 1b refers to the past situation of the speaker in Psalm 90, while the verbs in vv. 7-10 mention the actual situations of the speaker. On the contrary, v. 12-17 refers to the future.

are used to describe the nature of human life and accent the mortality of man. These terms, along with נֶדֶר “dust” and שׁוֹבֵךְ “return”, are reminiscent of the garden tale in Genesis 3 where the same terms occur (Gen 3:19; cf. In Gen 3:19 where instead of the word נֶדֶר the word נֶגֶד is used. However, the same thought is also implied in Psalm 90). The purposeful use of these key-words lies in recalling the judgement of Yahweh in the garden tale and in carrying the meanings associated with it.<sup>6</sup> This means that on the one hand the judgement of Yahweh over the nation is a central theme in the psalmist's mind and on the other hand it carries a penitential character by which the psalmist expresses himself. Urbrock (1974:11) explains this properly:

Since the psalm deals with the mortality of man and with misery occasioned by human sin, it is not unlikely that these colo carry a double intent. Thus, while the obvious meaning appears to be that God takes man from the dust and turns him back thither, ... there may be a play on the idea of repentance and the rites of humiliation associated with it.

Thus, it is likely that in v. 3 the meaning of repentance may be associated with some disaster that has befallen the people of God.

As indicated above, vv. 4-6 describe God's time which is contrasted to the time of man. In v. 4 the expression “a thousand of

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<sup>6</sup> Tate (1990:444) notes that in Psalm 90 a direct relationship between sin and death can be implied with the background of Genesis 2-3.

years in your sight are like a day of yesterday” refers to the divine time which is beyond measure and which is not limited to any end (Seybold 1997:100-101). This may recall the eternity of God noted in v. 1. In contrast to this ‘time of God,’ the time of man is like “the new grass,” which springs up new in the morning and withers in the evening. This time of man, which is limited, has a definite starting point as well as a definite end, as the morning and evening (i.e., which are metaphors indicating the transitoriness of man) imply. The use of the metaphors, describing the human condition, is once again reminiscent of the nature of human transitoriness described in v. 1b and v. 3.

Verses 7-10 deal with the real situation of suffering which the psalmist is facing, as noted above. The misfortune and transience of man, written in vv. 1-6, are here applied to the “we” of the supplicants who are experiencing the suffering of the post-exilic period. Thus, the miserable conditions of life in the post-exilic communities is integrated into the general situation of human life in vv. 1-6. It is likely that the perfectum verbs (נָז, בְּלִינוּ, בְּנָה, שָׁת, בְּלִינוּ) in vv. 7-10 refer to the actual situation of the speaker, as Krüger argued (1994:195-203, 206), and the interpretation of vv. 7-10 as the present situation of the speaker may further be confirmed by the use of the two perfectum verbs (לֹא יָנוּ, עֲבֵרָהָנוּ) in v. 15 which describe the present suffering of

the post-exilic communities. The words “toil and trouble” in v. 10 and “how long” in v. 13 seem to refer to the duration of distress and in v. 15 the expression “the days you have afflicted us, the years we have seen evil” may reflect the miserable situation of the post-exilic communities.

## 8. Appeal

We have defined Psalm 90 as a community lament with the elements of prayer. According to Mowinckel (1962a:23-24) and Westermann (1981:55-56), the communal lament contains not only a cry for help, but also a statement of wrongs suffered. Moreover, the lament functions in motivating Yahweh to intervene in the present situation the psalmist is facing. The above statements lead us to assume that one of the functions of Psalm 90 is to appeal to God in order to persuade him. Our task in this section is to trace the attempts at persuading God to alter his plan.

Verses 1b-2 form a hymnic introduction which provides the understanding of the whole psalm (Schreiner 1978:80). This hymnic introduction provides a basis for expressing a persuasive appeal.

As indicated, the divine title יְהָוָה frames the whole psalm with its appearance in v. 1b and v. 17. Here the title plays two roles in connection with vv. 1b-2. First, it indicates the Lord of history, and second, it refers to the creator of the universe. God as the Lord of history had been a refuge for the past generations (see above). This review of the beneficial past of Yahweh's people functions for the psalmist as an acknowledgement of trust which motivates an entreaty to God to mitigate the hardship he is facing (Pss 44:1-4; 80:9ff).

Because he had been a refuge for the past generations, the psalmist also expects his help in his present situation. However, despite this fact, the use of the verb יָמַד (see above) may reflect the psalmist's present dilemma that Yahweh was a refuge in the past, but is no longer with us. By contrasting the former action of God (i.e., Yahweh was a refuge in the past) in v. 1b with his present action (i.e., by the implication of v. 1b, ), the psalmist makes an indirect appeal as to why he has not been with us.

God as a creator of the universe is found in the descriptions of the creation in v. 2. This creation motif also functions as an appeal to God. In v. 2 God is portrayed as having been prior to all that exists, as the creation of the earth and the world implies. For the psalmist, the concept of this creation implies that the people's affliction comes from God, since he is a creator who can command death (v. 3) and since only a creator can make the life of man transient. Thus, in v. 3 the psalmist laments that God returned the life of man to death and in v. 13 the psalmist uses the concept of God's creation as the basis of the appeal to God by praying that he would turn back again to man. For the psalmist, death is not viewed as natural, but as the work of God, because death happens to the children of men at the command of God. Moreover, the toil and trouble of life is not mere misfortune, but it is the effect of the

wrath of God.

The psalmist's attempt to persuade God to intervene in his present situation is also visible in vv. 13ff. The use of the term "servants" in vv. 13 and 16, which is paralleled with "us," is obviously intended to appeal to God. The word "servants" is a relative term, implied in the relationship between Yahweh and his people, holding the power of an appeal. How can he deny the appeal of his servants? Verses 13b and 16a read: "Have compassion on your servants" and "May your works be shown to your servants." This appeal belongs to the principle of solidarity with the preceding generations of Israel (Westermann 1980:121), and on this ground the psalmist appeals to God to change the situation he was facing, reminding him of the things he has done for his people in the past. The use of the term "servants" may accordingly imply the conviction of the psalmist that God cannot deny the prayer of his servants, since he has had a special relationship with them in the past.<sup>7</sup> With respect to this, it is worth noting that v. 14 indicates the consequences of God's changing the situations of the psalmist. The result would be that his days would be filled with gladness and rejoicing in the

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<sup>7</sup> However, Tate (1990:438) points out that the psalmist is "one of the 'servants' whose prayer is designed to encourage and instruct his/her distressed fellow 'servants'."

morning.<sup>8</sup> The word “in the morning” echoes v. 6 where the same word appears and where it addresses the transitoriness of man’s life, which may reflect the distresses of the communities of faith. Thus, in v. 14 the psalmist is appealing to God to change his present situation. In a similar way as v. 14, v. 15 is also linked with the previous verses. The words “days” and “years” are reminiscent of vv. 9-10 where the words are also found. Verses 9ff describe the days and years of transient man under God’s wrath, but v. 15 prays for their return. Finally, the psalmist’s request is more concrete in v. 17. He makes it clear to God that his only hope is the re-establishment of the work of the servants’ hands.

On the other hand, Psalm 90 forms certain ties with Moses, and it is also likely that he plays in this psalm the role of the appealer to God. The title of the psalm ascribes its authorship to Moses,<sup>9</sup> which is unique in the Psalter. Many exegetes ignore the title by omitting it from their interpretation of the text, because there is a lack of visible correspondence between the title and the body of the psalm. In this case the title is regarded as not belonging to the text.

Even though there are difficulties in connecting the title with

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<sup>8</sup> Barth (1975:226-228) notes that in the Old Testament the morning may be the proper time for divine help. It is likely that the morning may imply a plea for help, as the phrase of Psalm 46:5[6] implies.

<sup>9</sup> The reference to “Man of God” is used six times in referring to Moses in the Old Testament (Deut 33:1; Jos 14:6; 1 Chron 23:14; 2 Chron 30:15; Ps 90: 1; Ezra 3:2).

the body of the psalm, the presence of the title implies an exegetical basis. Slomovic (1979:376) has made a useful remark relating to the use of the title: “The title of Psalm 90 was influenced by the similarities of thought between many utterances attributed to Moses and the identical expressions found in this Psalm.” In fact, some words and phrases occurring in this psalm are reminiscent of the events surrounding Moses (Slomovic 1979:376; Fishbane 1985:405). The words שׁׁוב (turn back, v. 13), גֶּנְךָ (anger, vv. 7, 11), מַחֲנֵה (have pity, v. 13), עֲבָדָךְ (servants, v. 13), and כְּלֹה (be consumed, v. 7) strike a parallel with the words found in Moses’ prayer after the apostasy of the golden calf (Exod 32:10-13). On the other hand, Psalm 90 forms certain ties with the song of Moses in Deuternonomy 31:30-32:47 (Briggs & Briggs 1969:272; Tate 1990:438). In Deut 32:36, Moses tells the Israelites that Yahweh “will have compassion (מִתְנַזֵּן) upon his servants” (עַל־עֲבָדָיו), while in Psalm 90:13, the psalmist prays for Yahweh to “have compassion (מִתְנַזֵּן) on your servants” (עַל־עֲבָדֵיכֶם). Moreover, as in Psalm 90:2 the creation work of Yahweh is described with the verbs בָּרַא and חָזַק, so Deuteronomy 32:18 also uses the same verbs to describe his work: “You neglected the Rock who begot (בָּרַא) you, and forgot the God who gave you birth (חָזַק).” Finally, Psalm 90:15 contains two unusual plural forms, נִזְמָן and שְׁנָוֶת, which are not found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, except for Deuteronomy 32:7

(Tate 1990:438).

It is quite difficult to define how Psalm 90, Exodus 32 and Deuteronomy 32 are related, but it is possible to deduce some clue to the interpretation of the texts and their relationship, if we accept the remark of Freedman (1985:59) on Psalm 90:

whoever put the heading on Psalm 90, attributing it to 'Moses, the Man of God' must have known that Moses alone tells God to 'turn' and 'repent.' Another possibility---and a more likely one in my view--- is that the composer of the psalm based it on the episode in Exodus 32 and imagined in poetic form how Moses may have spoken in the circumstances of Exodus 32.

Freedman shows that Moses is the only person in the Hebrew Bible who commands Yahweh not to act against the ancient Israelites in retribution for their sins. In fact, since the Targum to Psalm 90 titles it, "A prayer of Moses the prophet, when the people of Israel sinned in the desert," it is likely that Psalm 90 should be regarded as functioning as a prayer of Moses.

## Chapter III

### 1. Wilson's thesis

Being concerned with the final form of the canonical Hebrew Psalter and looking for evidence of editorial principles, Wilson (1985) has noted the placements of Psalms 89 and 90 in the Psalter. According to him, Psalm 89 primarily deals with the covenant between Yahweh and David, but that covenant in the contents of Psalm 89 is viewed as an event of the distant past (Wilson 1986:90-91). Wilson (1986:90-91) writes:

... the Davidic covenant is not only an event of the distant past  
... rather it is now a covenant *failed*...It is this problem of the failure of YHWH to honor the Davidic covenant that stands at the heart of Ps 89 and is the object of the plea with which the psalm and the first major segment of the Psalter end.

In contrast to this despairing experience of Psalm 89, according to Wilson (1985:215), Psalm 90-106 function as the editorial "center" of the final Psalter and stand as the "answer" to the problem of the failed covenant posed in Psalm 89.<sup>10</sup>

Though Wilson points out the function of Psalm 89 within the

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<sup>10</sup> Wilson (1985:215) summarises the answers in Book IV to the questions of Psalm 89 as the followings: (1) YHWH is king; (2) He has been our "refuge" in the past, long before the monarchy existed (i.e., in the Mosaic period); (3) He will continue to be our refuge now that the monarchy is gone; (4) Blessed are they that trust in him!

whole of the Psalter, he does not endeavour to draw in detail the relationship of the psalm with Psalm 90 in terms of how the former is related to the latter. However, his argument that Psalm 90-106 answer the questions put forth by Psalm 89 supports the idea that Psalm 90 is related to Psalm 89 in terms of canonical perspectives. Here our main concern is to draw relationships between Psalms 89 and 90 and to suggest that the latter responds to the theological questions put forth by the former in significant ways. Along with this, we shall also look at the relationships between Psalms 90 and 91 which may shed light on understanding the theological perspectives of the former. The conclusions from reviewing the three psalms in terms of the relationships lead us to argue that Psalm 90 should be read along with Psalms 89 and 91, especially with Psalm 89 and that the actual situation of Psalm 90's appeal should be understood in the light of the lament section of Psalm 89.

## 2. A method to be pursued

In this part our main concern is to treat Psalm 90 in connection with adjacent psalms (89 and 91), as noted above, and to analyse the three psalms as a text. That is to say, Psalm 90 is compared with Psalms 89 and 91. In order to achieve this purpose, we shall analyse and compare the three psalms in terms of lexical, thematical and structural aspects. The lexical analysis identifies the words occurring in both Psalms 89 and 90 or 90 and 91 and highlights the points which can be contributed to the links between the two psalms. Certain words may accidentally occur in both psalms or may function as vital links connecting the two psalms. In this case, whether the words mark incidental links occurring in both psalms or links unique to the psalms, depends on how often they occur in Book III-IV or in the whole of the Psalter. For example, when the word "love" occurs only in Psalms 89 and 90 in the whole of Book III or IV of the Psalter, it can be regarded as a significant link. Concerning this, when the word(s) occurring in both psalms function(s) as a major determinant of the theme linking one psalm with another, it should be considered a significant link.

The thematic analysis identifies common themes between two psalms and clarifies the development of the theme between them. The

purpose of this analysis lies in stressing and drawing close links between the psalms in the same way as the lexical analysis.

In addition, the analysis of the structure and contents of the psalms, in the same way as the analyses noted above, finds common ground between the psalms, pointing out the links between them.

These analyses demonstrate the relationships of Psalm 90 with 89 and 91 by identifying links, and the links found by these analyses show us that Psalm 89 displays close links with Psalm 90 and that the latter is also linked with Psalm 91.

### 3. Psalms 90 and 89

Psalm 89 can be divided into three parts in terms of generic analysis: hymnic praise (vv. 2-3, 6-19); divine oracle about David (4-5, 20-38); lament (vv. 39-52).

On the surface, the differences between Psalms 89 and 90 are easily observed. The former closes Book III of the Psalter, while the latter begins Book IV. Moreover, the title of the former ascribes its authorship to Ethan, but the latter's title designates it as "A prayer of Moses the man of God." However, despite these differences, the close ties between the psalms are also visible. The lexical and thematic links between the psalms are very strong, and there are also some structural links present.

The lament section (vv. 38-52) of Ps 89 lacks the expression of trust in Yahweh which is normally found in lament psalms. Moreover, as Tate (1990:430) notes, the psalm ends without a resolution to the perplexing and painful experience described in the lament section.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, the beginning of Book IV, Ps 90, starts with a lament mixed with praise and prayer, but it is unlikely that the beginning (Ps 90) of a new book starts with a lament. These

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<sup>11</sup> Tate (1990:428) notes that Psalm 89 "reflects the perplexing experience of the contradiction between old promises and understandings of the ways of God and the actuality of the developments of history."

observations help us to read Ps 90 in continuation of Ps 89. Indeed, the former and the lament sections of the latter display close links in significant ways, and mark the flow of natural thought in reading them together.

### 3.1. Lexical analysis

The two psalms share 34 words in common.<sup>12</sup> Most of the words listed are incidental, but some function as significant links. The root חָמָה “wrath” is found in 89:47 and in 90:7, but except for Ps 90:7, it occurs only in Psalm 106:23 in the whole of Book IV, (though in Book III it appears four times [Pss 76:16; 78:38; 88:7; 89:47]). The root עַבְר “wrath” also occurs in Psalm 89:39 and Psalm 90:9, 11. However, it is not found elsewhere in Book IV (six times in Book III; Pss 78:21, 49, 59, 62; 85:4; 89:38), except Psalm 90. On the other hand, of great significance are the words עַל-וּמִיר in 89:46 and

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<sup>12</sup> אלְהִים אֶלְנִי (89:48; 90:3); אֶלְנִי (89:50, 51; 90:1, 17); אֹור (89:16; 90:8); אָלְהִים (89:8, 9, 27; 90:1, 2, 17); אָמֵר (89:3, 20; 90:3); אָרֶץ (89:12, 28, 40, 45; 90:2); בָּן (89:7, 31, 48; 90:3, 16); גָּבוֹר (89:14, 20; 90:10); דָּכָא (89:11; 90:3); הָדָר תָּדָר (89:2, 5; 90:1); הָוָה (89:37, 42; 90:1, 5, 17); חָמָה (89:47; 90:7); חָסֵד (89:2, 3, 15, 20, 25, 29, 34, 50; 90:14); דָּעַ (89:14, 22, 26, 49; 90:17); יְהֹוָה (89:2, 16; 90:11, 12); יְהֹוָה (89:2, 6, 7x2, 9x2, 16, 19, 47, 52, 53; 90:13); יְוָמִים (89:17, 30; 46; 90:4, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15); יְרָא (89:8; 90:11); כּוֹן (89:3, 5, 15, 22, 38; 90:17x2); עַבְד (89:4, 21, 40, 51; 90:13, 16); עַבְרָה (89:42; 90:4); עַד (89:39; 90:9, 11); עַד (89:5, 30, 47; 90:13); עַולְם (89:2, 3, 5, 29, 37, 38, 53; 90:2); פָּנָה (89:33; 90:8); עַז (89:11, 14, 18; 90:11); עַלְמָם (89:46; 90:8); עַז (89:23; 90:15); שְׁמָח (89:15, 16, 24; 90:8); רָאָה (89:49; 90:16); רָנֵן (89:13; 90:14); שָׁוֹב (89:44; 90:3, 13); שְׁמָח (89:43; 90:14, 15); חַבְל (89:12; 90:2).

עַלְמָנָה in 90:8 which can respectively be translated as “his youth” (in Psalm 89:46 the word “shame” may also imply “sin”) and “sins of our youth” (Briggs & Briggs 1969:274; Dahood 1968:325; Urbrock 1974:11). The root עַלְמָה occurs only nine times (Pss 9:1; 10:1; 26:4; 44:22; 46:1; 55:2; 68:26; 89:46; 90:8) through the whole of the Psalter, but it is never found elsewhere in the whole of Book III-V, except for Psalms 89 and 90. Moreover, the meanings of the words used in Psalm 89 and 90 are different from those in the rest of the psalms containing the root. In both psalms the use of the root is closely associated with the references to God’s wrath (see, God’s wrath in Psalm 89:47 and God’s anger in Psalm 90:7) and to sins (see, in Psalm 89:46 the words “shame” reminiscent of sins and “our iniquities” in 90:8), but in the rest of the psalms it is used with meanings like “secret” or “conceal” (Psalms 10:1; 26:4; 44:22; 55:2) or “maiden” (Psalm 68:26).<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the root has the exclusive meaning in Psalms 89 and 90 which is not found in the rest of the Psalter. In fact, since there is no occurrence of the root in the whole of Book III-V, except for Psalms 89 and 90, its occurrence makes a great contribution to the link between the two psalms.

It should also be noted that the divine title יְהֹוָה “Lord” also serves as an important link. Psalm 89 closes the psalm by repeating

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<sup>13</sup> See Brown, Driver and Briggs 1907, p.761.

it twice at the end (vv. 50 and 51) and Psalm 90 opens and closes with the title by using it once at the beginning (v. 1) and at the end (v. 17) of the psalm. Moreover, it occurs in several psalms in Book III, but is not found elsewhere in Book IV, except for Psalm 90, though the singular form יְהָנָן of the title is found in Psalms 97:5 and 105:21 in Book IV. Its occurrence in the adjacent psalms (89 and 90), not found in Psalms 87-88 preceding Psalm 89 and in the whole of Book IV, never seems incidental and thus should be regarded as a significant link between the psalms.

The phrase בָּנִים בָּנָי ("sons of men") in Psalm 89:48 and 90:3 forms another significant link between both psalms. It appears only in these psalms in the whole of Books III and IV,<sup>14</sup> and the two psalms use it in a similar context. First of all, its occurrence in both psalms has a close link with a creation motif, as the word בָּרַךְ "create" in 89:48 (cf. 89:13)<sup>15</sup> and the creation background of Psalm 90:2-3 (see analysis of Psalm 90) imply, and at the same time it is connected with a theme of death, as the words מְרוֹת "death" in Psalm 89:49 and נֹסֶת "dust" (death) in Psalm 90:3 indicate. Moreover, both verses of the psalms commonly refer to the ephemeral nature of man, as in Psalm 89:48 the expression "Remember how short my time is,

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<sup>14</sup> The phrase with the singular form יְהָנָן is also found in Psalm 80:18.

<sup>15</sup> Haglund (1984) points out that the phrase "you created all sons of men" refers to "general human decay" (78).

for what vanity you have created all mortals" implies, and as in Psalm 90:3 the sentence "You turn man to dust and say, 'turn back, O children of men'" indicates. Upon the consideration of all these features, the connection by using this phrase in both psalms does not seem accidental.

In addition to the words noted above, the word קָדַם "crush" is worth noting. The root קָדַם occurs only four times (72:4; 89:10; 90:3; 94:5) in the whole of Book III-IV, but the only occurrence in consecutive psalms is found in Psalms 89 and 90, though the contents of the psalms are different.

### 3.2. Thematic analysis

Both psalms also display thematic links in many ways. A striking thematic link is found in the use of the three roots, מִנְחָה "wrath," עֲבֹרָה "wrath" and עַלְמָה "sins," which are unique only to Psalms 89 and 90, as noted above. In both psalms these three roots are related to a common theme. In Psalm 90 they all occur at the same segment in vv. 7-9, the third strophe of the first stanza (see analysis of the psalm) and it can be observed that the direct reason of Yahweh's wrath described in vv. 7-9 (also v. 11 where the words אֶפְךָ and עֲבֹרָה also occur) is the sins of his people, as v. 8 contains

the words “our iniquities” and “sins of our youth.” Thus, the roots חֶמֶת, עֲבָר, and עַלְם in Psalm 90 are correlative with each other and the use of all three roots is linked with the theme which may be called Yahweh’s wrath. On the contrary, in Psalm 89:39 and 46-47 where the roots חֶמֶת “wrath,” עֲבָרָה “wrath” and עַלְם “sins” occur, the direct reason for Yahweh’s wrath (which brought about the loss of the Davidic dynasty described in the lament section of vv. 39-52), is not mentioned. However, Psalm 89:31-33 note Yahweh’s warnings against his people that if they violate his statutes and do not keep his commandments, he would punish their transgression (**עַשְׁפָא**) and iniquities (**עֲוֹנָה**). Since the lament section of Psalm 89:39-52 containing the references to the loss of the Davidic dynasty should be understood in the light of the divine oracle in Psalm 89:20-38 (Tate 1990:416) and since the loss of the dynasty should be regarded as the punishment of sins, the warnings described in vv. 31-33 support the idea that the sins of Yahweh’s people have caused his wrath described in vv. 39 and 46-47. Indeed, since the word **עַלְם** in Psalms 89:46 and 90:8 which is the term reminiscent of sin, occurs in both in association with Yahweh’s wrath,<sup>16</sup> it is likely that in the mind of the psalmist the direct reason for God’s wrath was thought of as the

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<sup>16</sup> In Psalm 89:46 the word occurs in a close parallel with the word **כִּנְשָׁה** “shame” which may be reminiscent of sin.

sins of his people. Thus, in the light of all these discussions, the usage of all three words found in Psalm 89 is completely consistent with the statements of Psalm 90:7-9 that the sins of the people have caused Yahweh's wrath. Thus, the fact that the occurrences of the three rare words in the adjacent psalms repeat the same theme, should be regarded as significant links. However, despite these links, the only difference between the psalms is that while Psalm 89 does not contain confessions of sin, Psalm 90 includes such confessions by referring to "our iniquities" and "sins of our youth" in v. 8. Thus, the latter responds to the former by dealing with the same theme as found in Psalm 89 and by making further statements on it.

Further thematic links between Psalm 89 and 90 are also to be noted. The eternity of Yahweh is found in both (89:30, 37; 90:2, 4) and both depict him as the one who covers all dimensions of time (89:30, 37; 90:2, 4), thus providing the implication that all men can trust him. In Psalm 89:12 the creation motif is presented in the words אָרֶץ "earth" and הָבֵד "world" and Psalm 90:2 describes Yahweh as Creator who created the earth and the world. In Psalm 89:17 those under the blessing of God exult "all day long" (v. 17), but in Psalm 90 those under God's wrath experience "toil" and "trouble" (v. 11) and pray for rejoicing "all our days" (90:14). On the other hand, while Psalm 89:46 says that Yahweh's wrath has cut short the days of his [David's] youth, Psalm 90 laments the short length of human

life under God's wrath (v.10, also vv. 9-10), which is full of toil and trouble, and prays for gaining a heart of wisdom to number the days (v. 12).

On the other hand, the oracle section of Psalm 89:23 proclaims that the wicked will not afflict (בּוּעַ) David, but the lament section of vv. 39-52 says that he had been afflicted, likewise charging Yahweh with having afflicted him. In accord with this, Psalm 90:15 states that Yahweh has afflicted (בּוּעַ) "us." Thus, the statement of the latter is reminiscent of the oracle statement of Psalm 89:23 promised to David by God, ascribing the provider of the affliction to Yahweh. In this way Psalm 90 answers the question raised by Psalm 89.

In Psalm 89:50 the psalmist asks Yahweh where his former love is (אָזְנֵי תְּרִיבָה תְּרִאשָׁנִים אֲנִי הָאֶלְקָנָה) and Psalm 90, once again putting forth the question, demands him to show compassion to his servants and to satisfy them with his love (vv. 13-14). On the other hand, the lament, "remember, O Lord, your scorned servants" in Psalm 89:51 may correspond to the plea, "have pity on thy servants" in Psalm 90:13. Interestingly enough, both verses have an imperative verb form (לֹךְ, לֹכֵד) respectively and also a plural form (לְבָנֶיךָ) of the word עַבְדָּךְ "servant." The noun in Psalm 89 appears four times (vv. 4, 21, 40, 51), but three, except for v. 51, occur in the singular form referring

to David. The plural form עֲבָדִים in v. 51 seems out of place, but its presence likewise refers to the descendants of David associated with the Davidic covenant. The presence of the plural form “servants” in Psalm 90:13 and 16 picks up the descendants of David in Psalm 89 and identifies them with the contemporary people of the psalmist, thus making it possible to read Psalm 90 as a continuation of Psalm 89.

### 3.3. Structural comparison

Finally, both psalms exhibit similar structural features. Both start with hymnic elements and end with lament. With regard to this, Psalm 89:39-52 describe God’s abandoning his people in the present, as opposed to his greatness and salvation in the past (compare vv. 2-18 to vv. 39-52). Similarly Psalm 90:1 refers to the beneficial history of God’s people in the past (v. 1b), but vv. 13-17 mention his absence in the present experience of his people (vv. 13-17). Moreover, the beginning of each psalm has the phrase רְבָרְבָר “generation to generation” (Psalm 89:2, 5; 90:1) and in both cases it is used in a similar context. In Psalm 89 the psalmist praises Yahweh’s establishment of the Davidic throne and his descendants (v. 5), a fact which has symbolized the security and refuge of Israel for

*many generations*; in Psalm 90:1 it is said that Yahweh has been our refuge (or “dwelling place”) for *many generations*. Thus, in both psalms the phrase occurs in association with the reference to refuge and within the section of praise. However, the main difference is that while Psalm 89 takes the Davidic dynasty as the symbol of the security and refuge of Israel, Psalm 90 accepts Yahweh as a direct object of refuge. A further structural link can also be noted, since the concern for Yahweh’s people is found in common at the end of each psalm by referring to “all of many people” in Psalm 89:51 and to “their children” in Psalm 90:16.

We have so far discussed the links between the psalms in terms of lexical, thematic and structural aspects. All the data given above concerning the links make it impossible to escape the conclusion that the links between Psalm 89 and 90 are not incidental. Especially the lament section of Psalm 89 displays close links with Psalm 90 in various ways. All of the above noted words unique to the lexical links between the two psalms occur in the lament section of Psalm 89, and the themes related to the words or independent themes are also found mostly in the lament section of the psalm concerning Psalm 90. These observations strongly suggest that the lament section of Psalm 89 should be read along with Psalm 90.

#### 4. Psalms 90 and 91

That there are strong connections between Psalms 90 and 91 or between Psalms 90-92 has already been noticed by many scholars. For example, regarding Psalms 90-92 as a group and interpreting them in a certain sequence, Kirkpatrick (1903:553) has noted that Psalm 90 is the plea of Israel in exile, to which Psalm 91 delivers “the voice of faith assuring Israel that it will be safe in the midst of the calamities which are about to fall upon Babylon.” Contrary to this, Psalm 92 consists of thanksgiving for deliverance.

Though there is no agreement among scholars about the dates of origin of the three psalms, Kirkpatrick’s attempt (1903:553) to look at the psalms in terms of a certain concatenation has been supported by many scholars (Rogerson & Mckay 1977:204; Reindl 1981:350-356; Wilson 1985:215f; Zenger 1991:212-214; 1994:156-157; Howard 1993:110-112; Krüger 1994:213-214; Sheppard 1992:151) in some way or another. When read together as a text, it becomes clear that they carry certain messages. Here our concern is with the relationship between Psalm 90 and 91.

#### 4.1. Lexical analysis

Psalms 90 and 91 have 12 lexemes in common.<sup>17</sup> Most of the words listed are incidental, not contributing to links. However, the word יְהוָה is a significant link. The word as a noun form referring to Yahweh occurs only five times in the whole of the Psalter (26:8; 68:6; 71:3; 90:1; 91:9), but it appears once in Psalms 90:1 and 91:9 respectively, being juxtaposed in the corpus of Psalms 90-106, except for Psalm 104:22 where it refers to the “dens” of animals rather than to “dwelling place” or “refuge” as in Psalms 90:1 and 91:9. Therefore, its occurrence in these adjacent psalms does not seem to be accidental.

Less significant than the word יְהוָה but still important is the word עֲבָדָשׁ. The relationship between Psalm 90 and 91 with regard to the occurrence of the word עֲבָדָשׁ is drawn by the use of the word in both psalms. In Psalm 90:14 the psalmist prays to God to have mercy on his servants and to “satisfy” them with his love in the morning and Psalm 91:16 responds to that with God’s oracle by saying, “I will satisfy him with long days.” In Psalm 90 the psalmist

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<sup>17</sup> אֱלֹהִים (90:4; 91:7); אָמֵר (90:4; 91:2); יִדְעַ (90:11, 12; 91:14); מִזְבֵּחַ (90:4, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15; 91:16); יִדְאָה (90:11; 91:5); לְכַלֵּה (90:4; 91:5); מִשְׁעָן (90:1; 91:9); שְׁרוֹף (90:10; 91:5); בְּעִירָה (90:4; 91:8); רְאֵת (90:15, 16; 91:8); רְעוּה (90:15; 91:10); שְׁבֻעָה (90:14; 91:16).

laments the transient life of human beings, but Psalm 91 promises a long life ("long days"). Thus the psalms form a parallel with regard to the use of the word.

#### 4.2. Thematic analysis

Stronger links between the psalms are found in thematic aspects. In Psalm 90 the psalmist describes Yahweh as "a refuge" (v. 1) whom he has trusted and he supplicates the restoration of God's mercy for his servants. In response, Psalm 91 demonstrates throughout the psalm that Yahweh is a refuge and answers with the promise of salvation for those seeking refuge in him (vv. 14-16). At the beginning of the psalm Yahweh is portrayed as "shadow of the Almighty" in which "the pious believer ... has sought shelter and protection..." (Luke 1972:192), and as Hugger (1971:58-59) notes, the word נִזְמָן "refuge" in Psalm 91 is a key-word by which the whole psalm can properly be understood. The word "refuge" (vv. 2, 4, 9) used three times in the psalm, occurs only in this psalm throughout the Psalter, and gives the strong assurance that the prayer of Moses in Psalm 90 will be answered (Sheppard 1992:150-151). Psalm 90 confesses the fact that Yahweh is a refuge and asks him to have mercy on his people, while Psalm 91 provides the assurance of protection through the metaphors of refuge like "shelter," "shadow,"

"pinions" and "wings," etc., (vv. 1-13) and through divine oracle (vv. 14-16).

Other thematic links should be noted. In Psalm 90 the psalmist states that Yahweh's servants have experienced affliction as well as evil for many years (v.15) and in Psalm 90:15 he prays to God to save him from such experiences. From the perspective of the conjunction between Psalm 89 and 90, this experience echoes Psalm 89 where it is said that the psalmist has suffered at the hands of his enemies (89:43-47, 51-52), but Psalm 91 likewise answers the prayer of the psalmist in Psalm 90 by saying "you will see the recompense of the wicked" (v. 8) and "I will show him my salvation" (v. 16).

In Psalm 90 Moses is described as the one who prays for the communities of faith, as the title indicates and as the body of the psalm displays ties with Moses, as noted above. The connection with Moses is also evident in Psalm 91. As Snaith (1934:55-58) and Briggs & Briggs (1969:279) have already noted, the psalm displays strong links with the Song of Moses in Deut 32. If this is the case, Psalms 90 and 91 have Moses-dimensions which may lead us to see a further link between them. In addition, both are concerned with Yahweh's people, the servants in Psalm 90 and the faithful in Psalm 91.

As we have seen so far, Psalm 90 displays strong links with Psalm 91, and the latter seem to answer the former by saying that Yahweh is a sure refuge. When these two psalms are read together in

cononical context, they bear a definite message: Psalm 90 reflects the perplexing situations which the post-exilic communities of faith experienced, while Psalm 91 provides assurance to the communities by reminding them that Yahweh can guide those seeking security and protection. The former poses theological problems to be solved, but in response the latter illustrates concrete examples of Yahweh's protecting and securing his people, taken from nature and everyday life, answering the problems theologically.

## Chapter IV

### 1. Conclusion

At the introduction we stated that the purpose of this essay is to define the function of Psalm 90 within the psalm itself and with regard to Psalms 89 and 91. As we have seen, on the whole, Psalm 90 functions as a prayer seeking Yahweh's help, reflecting the perplexing experiences of the faithful communities in the exilic or post-exilic period. Verses 7-10 and 15 likewise reflect the present situations the psalmist was facing.

In Psalm 90 the psalmist persuasively appeals to God, using poetic devices variously. The review of the past history in v. 1b, as noted, indirectly speaks of God's absence in the present, and the use of the creation motif in vv. 2-3 implies that He is not only the cause of human misfortune, but that He can also renew man's life. In vv. 13ff the use of the term "servants" serves to remind God of the solidarity between him and his people and to ask him to have compassion upon them. One of the characteristics of this psalm is the relationship with Moses. Its title as "a prayer of Moses" is unique in the whole of the Psalter and, as noted above, many words and phrases found in the psalm correspond to those of Exod 32 and Deut 32 which in turn form close relationships with Moses. As Freedman (1985) noted, it is likely that the psalm can function as Moses'

prayer in canonical perspective.

In the light of its relationships to adjacent psalms, Psalm 90 responds to Psalm 89. As illustrated above, many words and themes occurring within the lament section of the latter are also repeated in the former. Many examples shown above illustrate that the repetitions of the common words and themes in both psalms are not accidental.

In the light of canonical perspective, Psalm 89 refers to the failure of the Davidic dynasty, while Psalm 90 answers it theologically. For example, the latter responds to several questions posed by the former: (1) Yahweh was a refuge in the past, but is no longer now (90:1b). This idea may reflect the thought of the lament section in Psalm 89 where the psalmist also bewails God's absence; (2) the direct cause for God's wrath is the sin of man (90:7-8). This may be a direct response to Psalm 89:46ff where sin and God's wrath are also mentioned; (3) the Davidic dynasty disappeared, but in Psalm 90 the psalmist again prays for God's mercy. Though we do not illustrate further examples, it is clear that Psalm 90 is answering the questions set forth by Psalm 89. If this is the case, the elements of the prayer expressed in Psalm 90 should be understood in the light of Psalm 89.

On the other hand, Psalm 91 responds to Psalm 90. As noted, the former illustrates throughout many metaphors that Yahweh is a refuge. It is likely that Psalm 91 provides assurance to the psalmist

of Psalm 90 who is seeking Yahweh's help in desperation. Especially Yahweh's oracle in Psalm 91:14ff likewise answers the plea of the psalmist expressed in Psalm 90:13ff.

All these considerations noted above lead us to argue that Psalm 90 should be interpreted in the light of Psalms 89 and 91, especially Psalm 89. It is likely that the prayer of Psalm 90 for God's intervention into the present situations of the psalmist reflects the situations expressed in Psalm 89.

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