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Taking a Stance toward God

Rhetoric in the Book of Psalms

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Any discussion of Jewish rhetoric must include the Hebrew Bible. The greatest figures of the Hebrew Bible, including Abraham, Moses, Jeremiah, and Job, are celebrated for arguing—not so much with other people, but with God. David Frank writes that “the God of the Hebrew Bible is, by nature, argumentative” and that “agonistic speech is the beginning of Jewish theology” (73).

Of all the parts of the Hebrew Bible that might spring to mind in association with argument, the Book of Psalms is probably among the last. “‘The Lord is my shepherd’; ‘by the rivers of Babylon’; ‘out of the mouth of babes’ (sic); ‘the valley of the shadow of death’—that’s probably about the extent of what the average post-religious reader carries around from the Book of Psalms,” as Christopher Tayler notes in his *Guardian* review of Robert Alter’s recent translation of the psalms. Readers who frequent a church or synagogue can do a bit better than that, having become familiar with the hymnic hallelujahs that make up parts of the liturgy. But they may be surprised to learn that only about a fifth of the 150 poems in the Book of Psalms are straightforward hymns of praise or other expressions to be expected from a religious assembly.

In fact, more than a third of the psalms have a first-person speaker who directly addresses God to give thanks, ask for something, or lament. The first-person speakers in the psalms are beset by opponents, whether other Israelites or aliens—they are the victims of false accusations, threats from neighborhood bullies, and slanders from gossips. They are caught in the trials of daily life—they are aging or sick; they face temptation, see the wicked prosper, and lose faith in God’s abiding presence. The problems have political, legal, and philosophical implications, but they are primarily personal

and social. The speakers deal with their problems by arguing with God, attempting to persuade God to intervene in their lives to resolve the crisis in which they find themselves. They ask for vindication, for their opponents to be swept away, for divine reassurance. As speakers seeking to persuade a hearer to enact a proposed solution to a serious problem, the psalmists are engaging in deliberative rhetoric.

When Israelites engage with God in the psalms, they know that the parties to the dispute are unequal in terms of the power needed to resolve the issue. But the plausibility of their arguments rests on three major assumptions. The speakers assume that both humans and the divine are capable of persuasion and open to argument. God's willingness to argue rather than just lay down the law bespeaks an extraordinary generosity toward humanity, for "it is sometimes a valued honor to be a person with whom another will enter into discussion," as Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca point out (16). The speakers also assume that their covenantal relationship to God binds both sides to promoting such key cultural values as קִדְּוָה (justice) and רַחֲמִים (lovingkindness). In most psalms, the primary reason for God to intervene is that these values are at stake. Finally, the speakers assume that, like humans, God may decline to respond to even the most eloquent and righteous speaker or may answer in an undesired manner. It is this feature that distinguishes the psalms from magical incantations (possibly including cultic ritual sacrifices) that need only be pronounced or performed correctly to be effective.¹ The speakers of the psalms are inclined to be persistent: if God does not respond to one appeal, the speakers continue to cry out, hoping that the desired response will eventually come. Psalms are designed to keep the Israelite community engaged in divine discourse even when the hoped-for response is not forthcoming.

Although God is the primary audience, speakers in the psalms also seem to shape their texts to influence public opinion. In ancient Israel, trouble was quickly taken as a sign of divine displeasure, so the afflicted were also subject to isolation. As such, the speaker in a psalm also seeks to be reabsorbed into the community. Thus, the speakers face complex rhetorical situations.

By viewing the psalms through the lens of contemporary rhetorical theory, it becomes evident that the shape of a psalm offers important clues to the speaker's assessment of the rhetorical situation or *kairos*, the speaker's current stance vis-à-vis God and the community, and his or her desired standing. My goal in this chapter is to illustrate the range of rhetorical strat-

egies adopted by speakers in the psalms by sketching the common stances that recur throughout the Book of Psalms. These stances, several of which I'll discuss here, are maintaining the status quo of a trusting relationship between God and the speaker, establishing the right of innocent Israelites to redress from trouble, denouncing others with competing claims for God's favor, appealing to God's self-interest in saving faithful Israelites, modeling the appropriate stance toward God for other Israelites, and convincing one's self to remain faithful.

Kairos and the Psalms

According to rhetorical theorists such as Lloyd Bitzer, in order for a situation to be a rhetorical situation, a speaker has to be experiencing a sense of exigence or urgency that can be productively addressed with language.² The speaker fashions the language into a spoken or written text and delivers it in such a way as to influence a particular set of hearers—those who have some ability to affect the situation and perhaps ameliorate its urgency. The art of the rhetor lies in making the most appropriate choices from among the available means of persuasion. The rhetor assesses the immediate situation, including the current stance of any possible hearers, and shapes the text to make it most likely to persuade—to change the beliefs, attitudes, or actions of—the intended hearers. These considerations influence the choice of claims, the amount and kinds of supporting evidence, the style, the forms of address, and even the length of the text. Rather than giving equal space to each point, speakers devote greater amplitude to points the audience will consider controversial and therefore most in need of elaboration and supporting appeals.

The most common move for a speaker in the psalms is to assume the mantle of innocence. In this, Israelites were quite unlike their neighbors in the ancient Near East, according to the scholars Dale Patrick and Ken Diable. When the personal god of an Akkadian or Sumerian was unresponsive in a time of trouble, the petitioner would perform a ceremony and write a prayer-letter to persuade a higher god to intervene on his or her behalf. The prayer-letters are similar in structure to the Hebrew psalms, describe similar troubles, and express similar dismay. However, the Mesopotamian petitioner commonly used the letter to confess to or plead ignorance of the sinful or neglectful behavior that had angered the god. Patrick and Diable write: "Quite the converse is true of the individual lament in the Hebrew

Bible; only rarely does the psalmist admit guilt; in fact, the general stance of the psalmist is that of an innocent sufferer” (21).

Presumably Israelites who felt guilty and sought forgiveness made the sacrifices and performed the rituals for expiating sins or resuming a state of ritual purity that are detailed at length in the Torah. Perhaps these do not survive in the Hebrew Bible because the occasions were considered unworthy of the intricate poetry developed in the psalms. Perhaps the situations that called for high art were precisely those in which none of the rituals of expiation applied, because the trouble was inexplicable. It is these situations that call for a direct challenge, persuading God to change in attitude or action, because God is allowing an innocent person to suffer for no reason. The present-day muting of this kind of challenge is precisely why the theologian Walter Brueggemann has argued forcefully for restoring the individual laments to the Christian liturgy, because they allow for a “redistribution of power” and “put God at risk” (59).

The underlying assumption in every lament is that God responds to Israelites because they are bound together by covenant. If an innocent and faithful Israelite is in trouble and God fails to respond, then God’s faithfulness and/or commitment to justice come into question. To use Stephen Toulmin’s terms, the covenant *warrants* the claim that God should respond to the speaker’s call. A culture’s strongest warrants are so blindingly obvious that they are often left unmentioned. Why remind a hearer—particularly an omniscient one—of what should be obvious? However, reminders are sometimes needed, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca emphasize, not because they change a belief or value but because they raise its salience or *presence* in the hearer’s conscious attention just at the moment when it is needed to support a claim.

Thus, as part of an extended argument to persuade God to take action, a frequent move is an explicit reminder of the terms of the deal, as in Ps. 22:5–6, Ps. 44:2–4, and Ps. 74:2.

REMINDER OF COVENANT

- Ps. 22:5–6 In You did our fathers trust, they trusted and You set them free. To you they cried out, and escaped, in You they trusted and were not put to shame.³
- Ps. 44:2–4 God, with our own ears we have heard, our fathers have recounted to us a deed that You did in their days, in days of

yore. You, Your hand dispossessed nations—and You planted them. You smashed peoples and sent them away. For not by their sword they took hold of the land, and it was not their arm that made them victorious but Your right hand and Your arm, and the light of Your face when You favored them.

Ps. 74:2 Remember the community You made Yours long ago, Your very own tribe that You redeemed, Mount Zion, where you dwell.⁴

In each of these cases, the speaker goes on to contrast the normal or ideal situation that occurred before the current crisis, in which the community or the individual is withering under some kind of attack—whether military, legal, political, or social. But the specific shape that the psalm takes from here on depends on the speaker's current standing vis-à-vis God.

Establishing the Right of Innocents to Redress

The psalmists clearly recognized that it is not enough to wave the covenant in God's face without some evidence that the speakers are holding up their end of the bargain. Perhaps God is ready to act for faithful and innocent Israelites but doubts that the speaker is someone to whom the covenant would apply. Speakers address these concerns in three common ways: making assertions; calling in outside testimony; and referring to God's knowledge of the speaker, either citing tests that God has conducted or God's previous interactions with the speaker.

Speakers often make positive assertions of being faithful and innocent, but they also make negative claims of having avoided evil, as in Ps. 17:4, Ps. 26:4–5, and Ps. 44:18–20.

ASSERTION OF AVOIDING EVIL

Ps. 17:4 As for human acts—by the word of Your lips! I have kept from the tracks of the brute.

Ps. 26:4–5 I have not sat with lying folk, nor with furtive men have dealt. I despised the assembly of evildoers, nor with the wicked have I sat.

Ps. 44:18–20 All this befell us, yet we did not forget You and we did not betray Your pact. Our heart has not failed, nor have our footsteps

strayed from Your path, though You thrust us down to the sea monster's place and with death's darkness covered us over.

Another way to support a claim to innocence is to present testimony from others. In ancient Israelite culture, this may have been difficult because Israelites who were in visible trouble were often shunned. Rather than citing character witnesses, the speakers in the psalms sometimes refer to being mocked or taunted by their neighbors. But when they are mocked for crying out to God, they can turn that to their advantage, as in Ps. 22:9 and Ps. 42:11, where they even use direct reported address to quote the mockers.

TESTIMONY FROM EXTERNAL WITNESSES

Ps. 22:9 All who see me will mock me, will open the lip, wag the head:
"Rely on LORD; He will deliver him, He will rescue him for He
delights in him."⁵

Ps. 42:11 Crushing my bones, my foes revile me, taunting me always
with, "Where is your God?"⁶

Seen as part of an argument supporting the speaker's own character, a taunt serves multiple purposes. First, it conveys the sting of humiliation, evoking the hearers' compassion. At the same time, the taunt is evidence that the speaker has trusted in God openly—so openly that his opponents make fun of him for it. If the mockers' taunts are to be believed, the ethos or character of the speaker is validated; he is the type of person to whom God should respond. Quoting the mockery even serves a third purpose, raising the threat that God's reputation is at stake: if God does not reply and rescue the speaker, then God may also be open to the mockery of the wicked or the nonbelievers.

Apart from adducing human testimony, including their own, speakers also appeal to God's knowledge of their case, portraying God in vivid terms as the midwife to their birth in Ps. 22:10–11, or as the tester of the speaker's character in Ps. 17:3, presumably when the speaker was struggling with his conscience.

GOD'S PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE AND TESTING

Ps. 22:10–11 For You drew me out from the womb, made me safe at my
mother's breasts. Upon You I was cast from birth; from my
mother's belly You were my God.

Ps. 17:3 You have probed my heart, come upon me by night, You have tried me, and found no wrong in me. I barred my mouth to let nothing pass.

Ps. 139:1–5 LORD, You searched me and You know. It is You Who know when I sit and I rise. You fathom my thoughts from afar. My path and my lair You winnow and with all my ways are familiar. For there is no word on my tongue but that You, O LORD, wholly know it. From behind and in front, You shaped me, and You set Your palm upon me.

In three psalms that I have treated more fully elsewhere (“Maintaining Innocence before a Divine Hearer”)—Ps. 22, Ps. 17, and Ps. 7—the question of the speaker’s innocence dominates the entire text, both in terms of content and expression. The speaker in Ps. 22 devotes an unusually lengthy opening to an extended defense of his innocence with all of the strategies described above. In Ps. 17, in addition to claiming to be innocent and providing evidence to support that claim, the speaker closely aligns himself with God morally and even in figurative bodily images, setting himself in a position superior to both opponents and other mortals.

In one of the most interesting innocence psalms, Ps. 7, the speaker dramatically shortens the usual claims to worthiness. Instead, he takes an oath called a conditional self-curse, calling down God’s retribution then and there if he did what he is accused of doing. The underlying sense of uncertainty introduced by the conditional character of the self-curse continues throughout the psalm, with the speaker calling for the appropriate degree of justice.

Ps. 7:9 Grant me justice LORD, as befits my righteousness and as befits my innocence that is in me.

The psalmists, who presumably wrote and performed most of the psalms on behalf of individual Israelites,⁷ seem in this case to have subtly positioned the speaker in a very precarious position, leaving it to God to sort out the merits of the case. In all these innocence psalms, however, speakers treat their innocence not as obvious but as precarious, a point in need of articulation and support: the better the case that the speaker makes for being innocent, the better his ground for challenging God’s neglect as a case of injustice.

Denouncing Others with Competing Claims

In a number of individual psalms—Ps. 35 is a particularly good example—the speakers are not concerned so much with defending their own characters as with besmirching the characters of their opponents. The opponents are uniformly described as enemies of the speaker; they are contemplating or carrying out plots, lying and making false accusations, or carrying out physical assaults. What is most interesting about these psalms is the explicit value they place on equity and reciprocity. For Israelites, justice means repaying a person according to his or her deeds. Thus the merits of the speaker and his or her righteous allies (the poor, the weak, the righteous) are directly mirrored by the faults of the opponents (the greedy, the arrogant, the wicked). The desired fate of the speaker (divine rescue, sustenance, public triumph) is mirrored by the desired fate of the opponent (divine punishment, destruction, public humiliation).

Disputes between speakers and opponents are described in very little detail, presumably allowing the same psalms to be used on a variety of occasions. However, a few psalms hint at particulars, such as false accusations of theft (Ps. 69:5 and Ps. 35:11) or the betrayal of a treaty (Ps. 7:4–6).

FALSE ACCUSATION

Ps. 69:5 More numerous than the hairs of my head are my unprovoked foes. My destroyers grow strong, my lying foes. What I have not stolen should I then give back?

Ps. 35:11 Outrageous witnesses rose, of things I knew not they asked me.

In denunciatory psalms, the speaker's assertions of innocence are not simply presented as reasons for God to respond, as they were in the innocence psalms. Instead, these assertions are part of the description of the opponent's attack and are designed to characterize the opponent's hostility as unprovoked, as in Ps. 59:3–5 and Ps. 35:6–8. The assumption is that had the speaker been guilty of any provocation, then the opponent's attack would be reasonable and unobjectionable.

CHARACTERIZATION OF ATTACK AS UNPROVOKED

Ps. 59:3–5 Save me from the wrongdoers, and from men of bloodshed rescue me. For, look, they lie in wait for my life, the powerful

scheme against me—not for my wrong nor my offense, O LORD. For no misdeed they rush, aim their bows. Rise toward me and see!

Ps. 35:6–8 May their way be darkness and slippery paths, with the LORD’s messenger chasing them. For unprovoked they set their net-trap for me, unprovoked they dug a pit for my life. Let disaster come upon him unwitting and the net that he set entrap him. May he fall into it in disaster.

As indicated by these examples, the Israelites’ view of justice is clearly reminiscent of the Torah-based principle of talion, “an eye for an eye” (Exodus 21:23–24). In particular, it is acceptable in Ps. 35:6–8 for the opponents to slip and fall in darkness because that is exactly what they were plotting for the speaker. The equivalence principle is also quite clear in the language of payment in Ps. 28:4–6.

CALLING FOR PAYBACK

Ps. 28:4–6 Pay them back for their acts and for the evil of their schemings. Their handiwork give them back in kind. Pay back what is coming to them. For they understand not the acts of the LORD and His handiwork they would destroy and not build.

The characters of the speaker and opponents are also presented as mirror images in another way, when speakers claim to have acted generously toward the very opponents who then attack them in Ps. 109:4–5 and Ps. 35:12–15.

RETURNING EVIL FOR GOOD

Ps. 109:4–5 In return for my love they accuse me, though my prayer is for them. And they offer me evil in return for good and hatred in return for my love.

Ps. 35:12–15 They paid me back evil for good—bereavement for my very self. And I, when they were ill, my garment was sackcloth, I afflicted myself with fasting. May my own prayer come back to my bosom. As for a friend, for a brother, I went about as though mourning a mother, in gloom I was bent. Yet when I limped, they rejoiced, and they gathered, they gathered

against me, like strangers, and I did not know. Their mouths gaped and they were not still.

From the speakers' perspective, the world of the Israelites seems black and white. However, there is evidence that this is not the whole story. In most cases, the opponents are almost certainly other Israelites. So through a rhetorical perspective, it is possible to imagine the disputes as situations in which different parties, each equally aggrieved, simultaneously petition God for rescue, each in beautiful and impassioned poetic language, each defending his or her own character and besmirching the other's. It is probably for this reason that the most common accusations against an opponent are plotting in secret, lying, and boastful, arrogant speech that the opponent hopes will go undetected by God. Only the speaker, the ostensible victim, seems to realize the truth and read the opponent's heart. By implication, the public and even God might not realize the opponent's true character. By accusing an opponent of habitual lying, a speaker may hope to undermine the success of a psalm that the opponent might offer.

OPPONENTS AS DECEITFUL

- Ps. 55:22 His mouth was smoother than butter—and battle in his heart.
His words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords.
- Ps. 64:6–7 They encourage themselves with evil words. They recount
how traps should be laid. They say, "Who will see them? Let
them search out foul deeds! We have hidden them from the
utmost search, in a man's inward self, and deep is the heart."

In a few cases, the speaker's sense of grievance is so strong that he or she is apparently indistinguishable from the opponent. In Ps. 109, one of a set of so-called "imprecatory psalms," a speaker spends the bulk of the psalm uttering blood-curdling curses against an opponent and the opponent's family, goods, and descendants. Amazingly, however, one of the faults that the speaker lays at the opponent's door is itself a love of cursing.

- Ps. 109:17–19 He loved a curse, may it come upon him, he desired not
blessing—may it stay far from him. He donned a curse as his
garb—may it enter his innards like water and like oil in his
bones. May it be like a garment he wraps round him and like
a belt he girds at all times.

As in Ps. 7, the innocence psalm in which the speaker seems to undermine his own innocence, the speaker in Ps. 109 may have been positioned by the psalmists to overdo it, leaving it up to God to sort out which of the two parties was worse.

Appealing to God's Self-Interest

The Hebrew word for the psalms, *tehilim*, means praises, and the psalms certainly live up to their name in containing unending praise of God. All this praise is in itself an appeal to God's better nature: if God claims the attributes of upholding truth, justice, and compassion, then it is fair to expect God to live up to these attributes. But the psalms also suggest that God wants to be praised in public discourse. Accordingly, numerous speakers make the case that God should rescue them because their deaths would deprive God of their praise.

ENSURING CONTINUATION OF PRAISE

- Ps. 6:6 For death holds no mention of You. In Sheol, who can acclaim You?
- Ps. 30:10 What profit in my blood, in my going down deathward? Will dust acclaim You, will it tell Your truth?
- Ps. 88:11–13 Will You do wonders for the dead? Will the shades arise and acclaim you? Selah Will Your kindness be told in the grave, Your faithfulness in perdition? Will Your wonder be known in the darkness, Your bounty in the land of oblivion?

The argument that God should intervene for the sake of continued praise receives its fullest elaboration in Ps. 71, in which the speaker attests to his previous role as a model for others to praise God, a function that cannot continue unless God rescues the speaker and renews his strength.

- Ps. 71:17–19 God, You have taught me since my youth and till now I have told Your wonders. And even in hoary old age, O God, do not forsake me. Till I tell of your mighty arm to the next generation, to all those who will come, Your power, and Your bounty, O God, to the heights, as You have done great things, O God, who is like You?

Serving as a Model for Others

In three psalms, Ps. 4, Ps. 62, and Ps. 82, the persuasive skills of the first-person speaker are directed not at God but at an immediate audience of listeners who may be straying from a faithful path.⁸ In Ps. 4, the extreme rivals seem to be apostates who are apparently worshiping other gods and prospering materially despite that fact. In Ps. 62, the hearers seem to be slipping in their behavior within the community—harming other people rather than worshiping other gods. In the unusual Ps. 82, God is the speaker who addresses an assembly of other deities, rebuking them for their failure to uphold justice and threatening them with destruction just like mortal princes.

In all three psalms, the speaker's rhetorical strategy is to establish his authority, rebuke the strayers directly, offer them steps to take toward recovery, and affirm the value of faithfulness. The persuasive power derives from the considerable space devoted to addressing and referring to the strayers, phrasing rebukes as rhetorical questions (for example, "how long will you go on?") and giving a sequence of imperatives to describe steps on a path back to good behavior. In Ps. 4 and Ps. 62, the speakers also use strategies of identification that seem to come right out of the books of Kenneth Burke or Chaim Perelman: they associate themselves with values that the hearers also cherish and offer the hearers ways to distance or dissociate themselves from hard-core evildoers.

Conclusion

Individuals offering a psalm may have had a variety of goals, such as seeking to stay on good terms with God, offering thanksgiving, and calling for justice. The psalmists do not see it as presumptuous to challenge God because, as Harold Fisch puts it in the case of Job, "the challenge is itself made possible only by the having been fashioned by a creator God in such a way as to be able to ask such questions" (32). Unlike Job, however, the psalmists do not seem to have waited for a response to come in the form of discourse. It is possible that they simply used future events to interpret the success or failure of a psalm (perhaps accompanied by a sacrificial rite): eventually an illness may pass or an opponent's anger may be appeased.

After offering a lament, individuals who perceive their situation to have improved may go on to perform psalms of thanksgiving, some of which in-

clude a recapitulation of the now-resolved crisis. Those whose problems persist may be encouraged to continue lamenting. Habituating Israelites to continue arguing and struggling with God, regardless of the outcome in any given case, rehearses the cultural commitment to justice, keeps alive the expectation of eventual deliverance, and wards off apostasy.

Like others who practice rhetoric, the psalmists recognize that arguments do not carry the force of formal logic, cannot guarantee a just or valid outcome, and—no matter how well conceived—cannot compel the hearers to assent.

This study indicates the promise of closer study of religious and sacred texts, whether in the Judaic or other traditions. This study suggests that the civic public arena is not the only one conducive for the discovery and honing of persuasive strategies. The psalmists in ancient Israel may have done so in a predominantly religious or cultic context, raising the question of how other ancient cultures regarded discourse with the divine, if they had any. Are the psalmists unique in their willingness to make face-threats to God and challenge divine injustice?

In the case of archaic Greece, Jeffrey Walker has already argued for the centrality of persuasive discourse in poetic form: “Insofar as epideictic is the ‘primary’ or central form of rhetoric, and poetry is the original and ultimate form of epideictic (or is understood as such), poetry is also the original and ultimate form of rhetoric” (41). The poetic texts that Walker examines in making this case, however, are primarily secular, written to celebrate athletic achievements or to entertain in symposia; he does not consider how poets conceived of and addressed a divine audience.

The classicist William Furley notes that Greek religious hymns were not as well preserved and transmitted as civic and literary texts and have therefore received “less than their due attention from modern scholars” (29). The neglect of the hymns, he argues, has led to exaggerated emphasis on the rituals of sacrifice as compared to the Greeks’ conception of the sacred. In fact, Furley’s description of the general construction of the hymns points to their important similarities with the psalms, particularly the overall goal of attracting the favorable attention of the god: “The entire strategy behind hymn-composition and performance was to attract the attention of the divinity addressed in a favorable way; ritual and choral worship combined to flatter, woo, charm and persuade a single god or a group of gods that the worshipper(s) was deserving of sympathy and aid” (32). The types of hymns

bear at least some resemblance to the psalms, according to a listing by Menander in the classical period—most pertinently the petitions that included separate designations for positive requests (“precatory” hymns) and requests for averting something (“deprecatory” hymns) (Walker 307). Any surviving texts of these types especially warrant further rhetorical analysis.

Apart from comparisons with ancient Greece, this study indicates that the psalms warrant further study from scholars in Jewish and biblical studies because they offer important clues to the evolution of Judaic culture and theology.

NOTES

1. For a sketch of how the psalms might have operated in the sacrificial rituals of the Temple, see Charney, “Performativity and Persuasion in the Hebrew Book of Psalms.”
2. Bitzer conceived of the exigence as a feature of the real world external to the speaker, but other scholars such as Scott Consigny argue that individuals may also use rhetoric to create exigence. For a recent update on the concept of rhetorical situation, see Kathleen McConnell.
3. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are from Robert Alter.
4. The translation is from the Jewish Publication Society’s *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*.
5. The translation is from Hillel Goldberg, 69.
6. The translation is from *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*.
7. William Morrow suggests that the psalmists were a heterogeneous group: “the expert poets involved in composing lament, certainly in the stage of oral tradition, could have been skilled lay persons as well as identifiable functionaries of the religion of the large group such as temple singers or prophets” (68). He suggests that they may have composed and performed some psalms in “liturgical services conducted on an *ad hoc* basis for individuals in need” (70).
8. I give a fuller account of two of these psalms in “Keeping the Faithful.”

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