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Standing Before God in the Hebrew Bible: Rhetorically Centering Individuals' Petitions at the Dedication of the Temple (1 Kgs 8)

Abstract: The Hebrew Bible accords great moral agency to the collective "children of Israel." Its discourse focuses as much on the attitudes, words and actions of the nation as on those of kings, priests, or prophets, let alone ordinary individuals. Yet key texts emphasize that God's covenant is forged with individuals. The relative priorities of individuals vs. the nation are nowhere stated explicitly. However, a remarkable text, King Solomon's dedicatory address for the Jerusalem Temple in 1 Kgs 8, suggests that they have equal claim on God's attention. Solomon authorizes seven types of petitions, half for individuals and half for the nation. The importance of individuals' petitions is heightened through four distinctive rhetorical strategies—sequence, amplitude, narrative time, and billing. Implications are sketched for understanding the Hebrew Bible's conception of identity, agency, and moral character.

Keywords: Prayer; Petitions; Religion; Hebrew Bible; Jewish Rhetorics; Moral Agency; Amplitude, 1 Kings 8; Solomon; Narrative Time

Introduction

The relationship between the GOD of the Hebrew Bible and the "children of Israel"[1] is based on the Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) idea of covenant, a binding agreement between

[1] I follow the convention of replacing the tetragrammaton for the name of God with GOD throughout this article. As described by Umhau C. Wolf, the term "children of Israel" refers to a people, superseding the levels of household, family, clan, and tribe. See Wolf's "Terminology of Israel's Tribal Organization," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 65, no. 1 (1946): 45–49, https://doi.org/10.2307/3262217.

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a powerful figure who is to be respected and obeyed and vassals who are protected and supported.[2] The Hebrew Bible attributes an unusual degree of collective moral agency to the "children of Israel." According to Carol Newsom, while other ANE cultures sometimes treated "collective entities—cities, nations—as moral agents, ancient Israel developed this trope far beyond most other attested cultures."[3] In narratives as well as legislation, the attention devoted to the people's attitudes, words and actions rivals that devoted to those of kings, priests, or prophets, let alone to ordinary individuals. Yet key texts emphasize that the covenantal relationship holds between individuals and God.

Arguably, the overarching goal of the Hebrew Bible is to foster loyalty, to persuade generations of Israelites to follow God's laws and practices, thereby forming a sustainable community and promoting social justice within and beyond its boundaries. The foremost challenge to that goal is the free will, or moral agency, that the Bible generally accords to human beings.[4] Narratives and prophetic speeches show that loyalty often lapses, more often out of rebelliousness, obstinacy, or unconstrained appetites than out of ignorance of what God wants. Not surprisingly, then, public discourse in the Hebrew Bible is dominated by commandments, critiques and exhortations. Divine dissatisfaction with human behavior is sometimes conveyed in direct dialogue, as when God throws Adam and Eve out of Eden (Gn 3:16–19) or condemns Cain for killing his brother (Gn 4:9–12). But usually God communicates through seers—who interpret dreams and oracles, and prophets—who critique kings, priests, other prophets, officials, groups, and the people as a whole, exhorting all of them to change their ways.

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[2] See Moshe Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90, no. 2 (April–June 1970): 184–203, https://www.jstor.org/stable/598135; and George E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *Biblical Archaeologist* 17, no. 3 (1954): 50–76, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3209151. Both Weinfeld and Mendenhall distinguish the Sinai covenant (a form of suzerainty) from promissory covenants (or covenants of grant) with individuals such as Abraham and David.

[3] Carol Ann Newsom, *The Spirit Within Me: Self and Agency in Ancient Israel and Second Temple Judaism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021), 50.

[4] The modern concept of free will is, of course, alien to the worldview depicted in the Hebrew Bible. However, as Carol Newsom (*Spirit Within Me*) and Anne Stewart argue, individuals and even groups are frequently depicted as moral agents. See Anne W. Stewart, "Moral Agency in the Hebrew Bible," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion (*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.92.

Communication doesn't go in only one direction. As individuals and as members of groups, all people long to express their needs and to have a sense that those expressions are heard and considered. Some of these expressions come from the collective national entity, such as when the Israelites enslaved in Egypt reach the limit of endurance (Ex 2:23–24): "The Israelites were groaning under the bondage and cried out; and their cry for help from the bondage rose up to God. God heard their moaning, and God remembered the covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob."[5]

After the exodus from Egypt, the Israelites cry out again and again as they wander for forty years through the wilderness, a journey that occupies four of the five books of the Pentateuch (Torah). Early on, they panic over lack of water (Ex 15:22–25, 17:1–7; Num 20:2–11) and food (Ex 16:2–35). Later, they grumble that they are bored with their daily manna from heaven and think wistfully of the fish with cucumbers, leeks and garlic that they used to eat in Egypt (Num 11:4–6). God is rather put off by these complaints—even the quite reasonable concern about finding food and water in a desert—taking this "murmuring" as a lack of faith and threatening to wipe them all out and start all over with a new nation of Moses' descendants.[6]

The Hebrew Bible gives humans a remarkable degree of latitude for pushing back against the divine will. While often exasperated by the people himself, Moses more than once talks God down from anger against them. In the Golden Calf incident, for example, the people demand an idol to worship almost immediately after the revelation of the Ten Commandments that forbids graven images. The people were nervous that Moses was taking too long returning

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[5] Unless otherwise noted, translations are from *The JPS Tanakh: Gender-Sensitive Edition. A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures according to the Traditional Hebrew Text*, ed. David E. S. Stein, Beth Liberman, and Hilary Lipka, trans. David E. S. Stan, Beth Lieberman, and Job Y. Jindo, rev. ed. (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 2023), available on https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Tanakh.

[6] David Frankel reviews the scholarly literature on the murmuring motif, showing a general consensus that the earliest versions of the wilderness narratives did not portray the Israelites as "murmuring" in a rebellious way, though they did cry out for necessary provisions. Scholars disagree over when and why the motif was introduced. Frankel argues that passages about murmuring were first introduced to emphasize the miraculous nature of the provisions, then added to other passages to depict challenges to Moses' authority, and later still to depict rebellion against God, with the majority of additions occurring before the reign of King Josiah. *The Murmuring Stories of the Priestly School: A Retrieval of Ancient Sacerdotal Lore* (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2014), 61.

from Mount Sinai bringing the tablets on which God had inscribed the commandments (Ex 32). To avert the people's destruction, Moses appeals to God's reputation among the nations (Ex 32:12) reminds God of the promises to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex 32:13), and even asks to die himself rather than see the people wiped out or be left to guide them by himself without God's presence in their midst (Ex 32:32; Ex 33:15). On the basis of this narrative and the narrative of Abraham bargaining with God over the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:17–33), Reuven Kimelman argues that any worthy prophet recognizes a responsibility to coax God out of anger against the people when it seems misplaced or extreme.[7]

Ordinary individuals may also push back against God for what they see as divine injustice. As Avital Hazony Levi argues, being a loyal servant sometimes requires challenging God "to be just and fulfill his alliances."[8] Yet Hazony Levi, like numerous other scholars, sees an individual's standing with God as rather insignificant, giving much greater weight to their social relationships as members of the nation or people. In her view, "God's relationship to us as individuals does not transcend our human relationships but supervenes on them."[9]

While individuals in narratives are occasionally depicted uttering seemingly extemporary prose prayers, the settings are usually private.[10] It is in psalms where individual voices of protest resound in public in the form of first-person petitionary psalms (also referred to as "laments" or "complaints"), thanksgiving psalms, and psalms of trust or confidence.[11] The three forms are related. Petitions describe an on-going crisis and ask for help. In a thanksgiving psalm, speaker(s) express gratitude after a crisis has resolved, perhaps after an earlier petition or vow. In a psalm of trust, the speaker keeps the lines of communication open by rehearsing a commitment to remaining loyal. Carol Newsom considers the speaker in a

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[7] Reuven Kimelman, "Prophecy as Arguing with God and the Ideal of Justice," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 68, no. 1 (2014): 17–27, https://doi.org/10.1177/0020964313510860.

[8] Avital Hazony Levi, "Worship: Bowing Down in the Service of God," *Religious Studies* 58, no. 3 (2022): 497, doi:10.1017/S0034412521000044.

[9] Levi, "Worship," 498.

[10] Scholars focusing on prose prayer include Moshe Greenberg, *Biblical Prose Prayer* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983) and Judith H. Newman, *Praying by the Book: The Scripturalization of Prayer in Second Temple Judaism* (Atlanta: Scholars Press Society for Biblical Literature, 1999).

[11] See Davida Charney, *Persuading God: Rhetorical Analysis of First Person Psalms* (Sheffield, GB: Sheffield Phoenix, 2015).

thanksgiving psalm to be "a moral agent in his own story: although he may be vulnerable, he cries out and is answered," testifying in public to what happened and thereby "building up the larger community of worshippers."[12] As Laurent Pernot notes of epideictic discourse in other ancient cultures, first-person psalms are important not only because they illustrate what to praise and how to praise but also because they "express the moral foundation for praise."[13]

While the psalms have been cherished since antiquity, the Hebrew Bible never spells out exactly how or where the psalms were performed. It is not clear how composers and performers of the psalms—usually assumed to be Levitical priests, were related to the first-person speakers constructed in the text or whether psalms were adapted to fit the situation of someone who commissioned one.[14] Considering how rarely either the nation or individuals are depicted in narratives petitioning God and God's rather negative reactions to national "murmuring," it is worth trying to gauge the importance of human petition in the Hebrew Bible's scheme of things. What is the appropriate process for lodging an individual petition or prayer? Who has standing to complain? What priority is given to national as opposed to individual needs? What types of complaints receive divine consideration? And what means of persuasion are most likely to succeed with an omniscient, omnipotent hearer?

One key text in the Hebrew Bible that allows some of these questions to be addressed has often been overlooked by scholars of prayer and liturgy: the speech made by King Solomon at the dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem in 1 Kgs 8.[15] This lengthy narrative illustrates the petition process in minute detail, authorizes seven types of petitions by individuals and the nation, identifies legitimate petitioners as well as valid causes that precipitate petitions. In a previous article, I argue that psalms are part of this petitioning

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[12] Carol Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space: Constructing Identity and Community at Qumran*, (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2004), 206–207.

[13] Laurent Pernot, *Epideictic Rhetoric: Questioning the Stakes of Ancient Praise* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2015), 86.

[14] Susan Gillingham reviews the likely composition history of the psalms in "The Levites and the Editorial Composition of the Psalms" in *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms,* ed. William P. Brown, (Oxford, GB: Oxford University Press, 2014), 201–213.

[15] Slightly different versions of this narrative appear in 2 Chron 5:2–7:10 and in the Septuagint. See S. L. McKenzie, "1 Kings 8 A Sample Study into the Texts of Kings Used by the Chronicler and Translated by the Old Greek," *Bulletin of the International Organization of Septuagint and Cognate Studies* 19 (1986): 15–34. A full analysis of how these versions treat the issues raised here is beyond the scope of this article.

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process by showing that multiple psalms correspond to the seven types of authorized petitions.[16]

In the analysis that follows, I look more closely at the sophisticated rhetorical devices in 1 Kgs 8. I show that four devices—sequence, narrative time, amplitude and billing—signal the importance of the petitions themselves as well as the relative importance of the seven petitioning situations. By multiple measures, the needs of individuals are treated as equal or greater in importance to the needs of the nation. I conclude by sketching the implications of putting such a premium on human needs for understanding the moral philosophy of the Hebrew Bible.

Overview of the Temple Dedication Ceremony

The dedication ceremony in 1 Kgs 8 follows a lengthy and detailed description of Solomon's Temple, its furnishings and sacred objects as well as its construction, a process that ostensibly lasted 14 years. Solomon himself is portrayed as the prime instigator of every step along the way, though he consults with Hiram, King of Tyre and obtains skilled workers and materials from him, such as cedar and cypress woods.[17]

In the Ancient Near East (ANE), kings commonly held elaborate ceremonies to dedicate temples that they had built. The ceremony validates the temple, invokes the gods' protection, and impresses the people with the wealth and power of the king. The ceremonies included a procession with the god(s)'s statue(s), installation of the statue(s), rituals and offerings, prayers and speeches, and feasting. The prayers and speeches addressed to the god(s) called on them to accept the temple as a valid place for sacrificial rituals and to bless the king and his descendants. According to Peter Dubovský, "the prayers were attributed exclusively to the king who completed the

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[16] See Davida Charney, "The Centrality of Individual Petitions in Temple Rituals: Hannah, Solomon, and First-Person Psalms," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament,* 48, no. 4 (2024): 513–538, https://doi.org/10.1177/03090892231201681. In addition to discussing psalms and the Temple Dedication, I discuss the narrative of the childless Hannah praying for a son in 1 Samuel 1–2 as a depiction of a full and successful petition process. Hannah begins in inarticulate distress and ends with considerable social agency by singing a thanksgiving psalm.

[17] Hiram is identified several times as king of Tyre, but also in 1 Kgs 7:14 as a skilled bronze-worker with Israelite ancestry whom Solomon imports to carry out the work.

edifice and their content entirely concerned the king and his well-being."[18] Solomon's ceremony in 1 Kgs 8 differs in two major respects: the statues of deities are replaced with the installation of the ark of the covenant and Solomon prays for the welfare of the people rather than focusing exclusively on his own well-being.

Few historians date 1 Kgs 8 to the 10th century BCE when the First Temple was actually built. Some date it to the dedication of the post-exilic Second Temple in the 6th century BCE. I follow Gary Knoppers and Leslie Hoppe and others in viewing it as dating it to the 7th century reign of King Josiah, who centralized worship in Jerusalem, de-legitimated worship at local shrines around the country, and "discovered" the book of Deuteronomy that emphasizes themes of social justice.[19]

Centrality of Petitions within the Sequence of Events

The text in 1 Kgs 8 consists of 66 verses. Its internal structure, as mapped by Gary Knoppers, is provided in Table 1.[20] The ceremony is organized as a symmetric chiastic frame of paired elements. Chiasm is a major literary sequencing device in Hebrew texts. The outer elements are pairs of activities carried out by Solomon and the people. In the first pair, 1 Kgs 8:1–3, people of various kinds assemble (Step 1) and in 8:66, they disperse (Step 1'). In 8:5, the king and people open by making sacrifices (Step 2) just as they do in closing in vv. 62–65 (Step 2'). As Knoppers notes, attributing the sacrificial activities jointly to the king and the people underscores their solidarity, establishing the stake of the people across the nation in this central

[18] Peter Dubovský, "When a Building Becomes a Holy Place: Mesopotamian and Biblical Dedication Ceremonies," *Semitica* 64 (2022): 362, DOI: 10.2143/SE.64.0.3291280.

[19] Similar analyses of the overall structure and purpose of the text are provided by Knoppers, Hoppe, and Hildebrandt. Gary N. Knoppers, "Prayer and Propaganda: Solomon's Dedication of the Temple and the Deuteronomist's Program," *Catholic Bible Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (April 1995): 229–254, https://www.jstor.org/stable/43722338. Leslie Hoppe, "The Afterlife of a Text. The Case of Solomon's Prayer in 1 Kings 8," *Liber Annuus* 51 (2001): 9–30, https://doi.org/10.1484/J.LA.2.303525. Ted Hildebrandt, "The Temple Prayer of Solomon (1 Kings 8:1–9:9)," in *Speaking with God: Probing Old Testament Prayers for Contemporary Significance,* ed. Phillip G. Camp and Elaine A. Phillips (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers 2021), 51–65.

[20] Knoppers, "Prayer and Propaganda," 234.

Temple. The collaboration also sets up the rest of the king's activities as a model for how individuals can also perform the central steps. Whereas the outer steps (1–2 and 2'-1') involve movement and action, the central steps all focus on Solomon's speech, including blessings (3 and 3'), invocations of God (4–5 and 4'-5'), and petitions (6, 7, and 6').

Seven petitions are sequenced in the center of the ceremony. The seven petitions (labeled with Roman numerals in Table 1 and listed out in Table 3) all follow a standard formula: "Whenever [person/nation] faces a [specified kind of] crisis [for some reason] and [comes before/turns toward] this House, oh, hear in heaven and take action [for this reason]." Six of the petitions (in Steps 6 and 6') are each dedicated to a single type of crisis (e.g., military engagements or conflicts between people). The central petition (Step 7), which Knoppers characterizes as a Generalizing Petition, lists a collection of calamities, six natural ones (famine, pestilence, blight, mildew, locusts, and caterpillars) and one human one, an oppressive enemy.

TABLE 1. Sequence of 1 Kgs 8 Solomon's Petitionary Process

1. Assembly (8:1-4)						
	2. Sacrifice (8:5; installation of ark 8:6–11)					
		3. Blessing (8:14–21)				
			4. Solomon's Stance (8:22)			
				5. Invocation (8:27–30)		
					6. Three Petitions I, II, III (8:31–36)	
						7. Generalizing Petition IV (8:37–40)
					6'. Three Petitions V, VI, VII (8:41–51)	
				5'. Invocation (8:52–53)		
			4'. Solomon's Stance (8:54)			
		3'. Blessing (8:55–61)				
	2'. Sacrifice (8:62–64)					
1'. Dismissal (8:66)						

Source: Knoppers, "Prayer and Propaganda," 234.

It is apparent in Table 1 that the petitions are literally at the center of the entire ceremony. The petitions themselves are sequenced as two triads on either side of the central "Generalizing Petition." The fact that there are seven pairs of steps in the ceremony as a whole and seven types of petitions being authorized is significant;

according to Yosef Green, the number seven is "preeminent above all others in Semitic life and thought."[21] The careful structuring of the text overall indicates that the composition and placement of the petitions were also the product of careful consideration.

Narrative Time Devoted to Petitions

Apart from their central position in the sequence, the petitions are also emphasized by way of narrative time. Narrative time is defined by Nelson and Spence as the reader's/hearer's subjective experience of time as impacted by the sequence and expression of textual elements.[22] That is, the style of the text can make the real-time act of reading or listening seem faster or slower.

Not surprisingly, it is rare for narrative time to directly reflect the time that would elapse if the events in the narrative were really happening. When narrative time is running quickly, the text is moving rapidly even if the events that it is describing would take considerable real time. In the Temple dedication, narrative time is quick for the outer steps (steps 1, 2, 2', and 1' in Table 1). Consider, for example, the first two steps, assembly and sacrifice (1 Kgs 8:2–5):

> [2]The entire body of Israel gathered before King Solomon at the Feast [of Booths], in the month of Ethanim—that is, the seventh month. [3]When all the elders of Israel had come, the priests lifted the Ark [4]and carried up the Ark of GOD. Then the priests and the Levites brought the Tent of Meeting and all the holy vessels that were in the Tent. [5]Meanwhile, King Solomon and the whole community of Israel, who were assembled with him before the Ark, were sacrificing sheep and oxen in such abundance that they could not be numbered or counted.

In the real world, the activities described would have consumed an enormous amount of time. Transporting the ark on foot from elsewhere in Jerusalem might have taken hours. Further, sacrificing even a single animal is a laborious process. In Liane Feldman's accounting, the process includes seven steps (Lev 1:1–9): bringing the animal to the sacred precinct, laying hands on it to mark possession, slaughtering it, draining the blood and splashing it onto the altar, butchering

[21] Yosef Green, "Who Knows Seven?" *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (October-December 2013): 255. See also Scott B. Noegel, "The Significance of the Seventh Plague," *Biblica* 76, no. 4 (1995): 532–539, http://www.jstor.org/stable/42613862.

[22] Stephanie Nelson and Barry Spence, "Narrative Time," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature* (Oxford, GB: Oxford University Press, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.1076.

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the animal and preparing its parts, preparing the altar, and offering the animal on the altar.[23] A multitude of sacrifices would have taken many days. Two weeks are devoted to the sacrifices and feasting described at the conclusion of the dedication (Step 2' in Table 1). Yet all this activity is described in four short verses.

By contrast, the pace of the narrative slows drastically in the long passage between Steps 3 and 3' that spells out Solomon's words and movements while pronouncing the blessings (vv. 12–21 and 55–61), changing his stance (v. 22 and v. 54), invoking God by name (vv. 27–30 and 52–53), and articulating the petitions (vv. 31–51). Consider the minute attention devoted to Solomon's body posture, movements, and gestures—standing, turning, kneeling, directing his eyes, stretching out his hands, and crying out:

> [12]then Solomon declared: "GOD has chosen to abide in a thick cloud: [13]I have now built for You a stately House, a place where You may dwell forever." [14]Then, with the whole congregation of Israel standing, the king faced about and blessed the whole congregation of Israel. He said " . . ." [direct quotation in vv. 15–21]
> [22]Then Solomon stood before the altar of GOD in the presence of the whole community of Israel; he spread the palms of his hands toward heaven and said " . . ." [direct quotation in vv. 23–53]
> [54]When Solomon finished offering to GOD all this prayer and supplication, he rose from where he had been kneeling, in front of the altar of GOD, his hands spread out toward heaven. [55]He stood, and in a loud voice blessed the whole congregation of Israel: [direct quotation in vv. 56–61]

The fine level of detail in these passages serves several purposes. First and perhaps foremost, Solomon is modeling a public petitioning process for anyone who wishes their petitions to be equally successful.[24] While Solomon is an elite figure, Solomon repeatedly conjoins what he is doing and will do in the future to what the people will do. For example, in 1 Kgs 8:29, he describes the supplications that "Your servant and Your people offer toward this place" and in 1 Kgs 8:52, he again refers to "the supplication of Your servant and the supplication of Your people Israel." Rhetorically, slowing down the narrative time to zoom in to the level of individual movements

[23] Liane Feldman, *The Story of Sacrifice: Ritual and Narrative in the Priestly Source* (Tübingen, DE: Mohrs-Seibeck, 2020), 53.

[24] In a similar way, Aaron's inauguration of the Tabernacle in Lev. 8–9 set the pattern for the narrower activities surrounding the roles of priests and Israelites in the preparation and disposition of offerings in the wilderness. See Feldman, *The Story of Sacrifice*, 108.

emphasizes the importance of this passage relative to the narrative as a whole. And most detailed of all is Solomon's verbatim speech, i.e., the petitions that are also structurally central in 1 Kgs 8:31–51.

Amplitude of Petition Sections

The importance of the petitions and their relative priority can be gauged by their amplitude. Amplitude refers to the proportion of textual space that a passage occupies with respect to the unit as a whole. In *The New Rhetoric*, Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca note that "the length of each part of [a] speech will usually be in proportion to the importance [a speaker] would like to see it occupy in the minds of hearers."[25] Though he doesn't use the term, Noegel attributes greater importance to the 7th and 10th plagues on the Egyptians on the basis of their amplitude not only in Exodus (Ex 9:13–35 and Ex 11–12:1–30, respectively) but also in Ps 68:42–51 and Ps 105:27–36.[26]

Table 2 shows the amplitude of the dedication ceremony divided into three sections: the material before and after the petitions and the petitions themselves. Amplitude is reported in terms of the number of English words in the (2023) translation by the Jewish Publication Society (NJPS), available on Sefaria.org. The opening section (Steps 1–5) has the greatest amplitude taking up 41% of the whole chapter. Despite containing the same activities in reverse order, the closing section (Steps 5'-1') amounts to only 24% of the total amplitude. So significant amplitude is accounted for by central section with the petitions (vv. 31–51)—over a third of the whole.[27]

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[25] Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *Traité de l'argumentation: la nouvelle rhétorique* (Paris, FR: Presses universitaires de France, 1958), trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver as *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 143. Citations refer to 1969 edition.

[26] Noegel, "Significance," 533n8, 534.

[27] On the basis of comparisons with the Setuagint (the first Greek version of the Hebrew Bible), some scholars posit that additions were made to 1 Kgs 8:1–11 late in the Bible's redaction history. If so, the amplitude of the petition segment would be even greater. See Guy Darshan, "The Quasi-Priestly Additions in MT 1 Kings 6–8 in Light of 'Rewritten Bible' Compositions from Qumran" in *The Textual History of the Bible from the Dead Sea Scrolls to the Biblical Manuscripts of the Vienna Papyrus Collection: Proceedings of the Fifteenth International Symposium of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature, cosponsored by the University of Vienna Institute for Jewish Studies and the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies, 10–13 April, 2016*, ed. Ruth A. Clements, Russell Fuller, Armin Lange, and Paul D. Mandel, Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 137 (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2023), 219–240.

TABLE 2. Amplitude of 1 Kgs 8 Solomon's Petitionary Process

MIRRORED ACTIVITIES	AMPLITUDE in JPS English words		AMPLITUDE in JPS English words	
1. Assembly (8:1–3)	829	41%		
2. Sacrifice (8:5)				
3. Blessing (8:14–21)				
4. Solomon's Stance (8:22)				
5. Invocation (8:27–30)				
6. Three Petitions I, II, III (8:31–36)	700	35%	218	32%
7. Generalizing Petition IV (8:37–40)			122	17%
6′. Three Petitions V, VI, VII (8:41–51)			358	51%
5′. Invocation (8:52–53)	465	24%		
4′. Solomon's Stance (8:54)				
3′. Blessing (8:55–61)				
2′. Sacrifice (8:62–64)				
1′. Dismissal (8:66)				

Personages within the Petitions and Their Billing

Solomon authorizes petitions in seven types of dire situations where divine intervention is deemed appropriate, as listed in Table 3.[28]

TABLE 3. Seven Petitions Authorized in 1 Kgs 8

I. Individual offends another individual (8:31–32)

II. Enemy routs the nation (8:33–34)

III. Drought befalls multitudes (8:35–36)

IV. Calamities: famine, pestilence, blight, mildew, locusts and caterpillars; oppressive enemy (8:37–40)

V. Foreign individual seeks help (8:41–43)

VI. Nation wages war against enemies (8:44–45)

VII. Multitudes offend God leading to exile, sin inevitable for any person . . . forgive your nation (8:46–49)

[28] The Roman numbering for the individual petitions here is also provided for Steps 6–6′ in Tables 1 and 2.

Each petition follows the formula shown in Table 4. Addressing God, Solomon describes a crisis and its cause, and elaborates the actions and responses of those personages who are affected; specifically they all petition God themselves. Solomon prospectively asks God to hear their prayers and respond appropriately. Access to petition is exceedingly generous. Foreigners must come to the Temple, but Israelites may petition God from any location. No hours of operation are specified and no statutes of limitations are imposed; petitions may be brought whenever people feel the need.

TABLE 4. Petition Formula and Examples of Individual and National Petitions

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Formula

Whenever [person/nation] faces a [specified kind of] crisis [for some reason] and [comes before/turns toward] this House, oh, hear in heaven and take action [for this reason].

Individual Petition I, vv. 31–32

[31]Whenever one person commits an offense against another, and the latter utters an imprecation to bring a curse upon the former, and comes with that imprecation before Your altar in this House, [32]oh, hear in heaven and take action to judge Your servants, condemning the one who is in the wrong and bringing down the punishment of their conduct on their head—while vindicating the other, who is in the right, by rewarding them according to—their righteousness.

National Petition VI, vv. 44–45

[44]When Your people take the field against their enemy by whatever way you send them, and they pray to the GOD in the direction of the city that You have chosen, and of the House that I have built to Your name, [45]oh, hear in heaven their prayer and supplication and uphold their cause.

Only two types of petitioners (personages) are specified, either individuals or the entire nation of Israel—Table 4 provides an example of each. This restriction allows the relative priority or "billing" of the nation and of individuals to be assessed. In the convention of Hollywood films, "billing" refers to the relative values of the cast-members which are signaled by priority (whose name appears first), position on the screen (whether a name appears alone on the screen or with others, whether the others are higher or closer to the right), and typography. In order to assess whether the nation or individuals get higher billing in the petitions, I will compare the number

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of petitions accorded to each, the placement of those petitions in the sequence, their narrative time, and their amplitude.

In terms of number, as shown in Table 5, the nation and individuals are treated equally. Three petitions specify individuals; three specify the nation; and one uses both terms. The petitions specifying a person are (I) offenses of a man (Hebrew *ish*) against his neighbor (v. 31); (IV) various calamities threatening sustenance, physical well-being, and household security that affect a man (Hebrew *ish*) who offers a prayer or supplication, specifically a person (Hebrew *adam*) who knows the affliction of his heart (v. 38); and (V) visits from a foreigner (Hebrew *nokhri*), an individual who is not from among the nation (v. 41). In each of these, the petitioner in the opening phrase is designated in third person singular and the beneficiary of God's attention is also phrased in third person singular.

The nation of Israel, literally "your nation" (Hebrew *amkha Yisrael*) is likewise specified in three petitions: (II) "when Your nation of Israel is routed by an enemy" (v. 33); (III) situations of drought where the petitioners are "Your servants and Your nation of Israel" (v. 36); and (VI) "when Your nation goes out to war" (v. 44).

The remaining petition (VII) in 1 Kgs 8:46–51 pertains to those exiled to a distant enemy land. It mentions both individuals and the nation, though not in the usual place in the formula. The opening description of the petitioner is a non-specific plural, "when they sin against you" (v. 46) followed immediately by an aside referencing individuals who inevitably sin, "for there is no person (*adam*) who doesn't sin." The following references to petitionary actions are all plural. So conceivably this petition applies to individuals or to groups who are captured and carried off as hostages. However, the term nation occurs in v. 51, where God is subsequently asked "pardon Your nation" (*amkha*). For these reasons, this petition can be counted as shared in both personage categories, leaving the seven petitions equally divided between individuals and the nation.

In terms of sequence, petitions for individuals get prime sites among the seven. As shown in Table 1, the seven petitions may be arranged in two triads (I, II, and III in the first and V, VI, and VII in the second) with the longer "generalizing" petition listing a variety of calamities (IV) located between the triads. Notably, within each triad, petitions for individuals come first (I and V) and as well as taking the central position of the seven (IV).

In terms of narrative time, the formulaic expression of the petitions makes them more or less equivalent for both personages.

But individuals come out ahead in terms of amplitude, as shown in Table 5. More page real estate is devoted to petitions for individuals (42%) than for those for the nation (28%).

Overall, then, the needs of individuals are treated as at least as or more important than the needs of the nation. The two personages are equal in terms of number and narrative time; individuals are more prominent in terms of placement in the sequence and amplitude. Before considering the causes of the crises and the types of crises authorized for these two personages, it is important to appreciate who counts as an individual.

TABLE 5. Balance of Petitions by Personage

PERSONAGES	AMPLITUDE (JPS English words)		
		Total	Pct.
Individuals			
I. Individual offending another individual	74		
IV. Calamities: famine, pestilence, sickness; oppression from an enemy (singular individual within the nation)	125		
V. Foreign individual seeks help	96	295	42%
Both			
VII. Multitudes offend God leading to exile, sin inevitable for any person . . . forgive your nation	209	209	30%
Nation			
II. Enemy routs the nation	60		
III. Drought befalling multitudes . . . pardon sin of your servants, your nation	81		
VI. Nation wages war against enemies	54	195	28%

The Inclusiveness of Individual Personhood

No distinctions of class, tribe, or status are drawn among the people who are authorized to petition God in 1 Kgs 8. No special provision is made for the usual elites—princes, priests, tribes, elders, or for any of the usual protected groups—widows, orphans and the fatherless, and the poor. Such elites, including elders, heads of ancestral tribes, and priests—both Kohanim and Levites, were singled

out earlier in the text (1 Kgs 8:1–3) to transport and install the ark of the covenant. The petitions instead convey an egalitarian inclusiveness, signaled in the terms used to refer to individuals and in the use of quantifiers and asides.

The most startling specific inclusion is the access afforded to foreign individuals (1 Kgs 8:41–43). Nowhere else is such favor granted to foreign visitors, those designated with the term *nokhri*, who are not expected to be treated as equals. In contrast, the welfare of strangers who are residents in the land (referred to as *gerim* "guests" or "sojourners") is legislated in several places (e.g., Ex 12:49, Ex 22:20, Lev 19:33–34) and such residents are allowed to make free-will offerings in the same way citizens of the nation do (Num 15:4–16). The stated reason for granting such access is to augment God's renown in other nations, a consideration that appears often in appeals to God to overturn apparent injustices.

The inclusiveness of the general terms used to refer to a person, "man" *'ish* and "human" *adam* or *ben-adam,* is greater than it may seem. The term *'ish* "man" (pl. *anashim*) conveys masculinity when immediately contrasted with the term *'isha* "woman" (pl. *nashim*) or when the context clearly specifies males. Yet the term *'ish* can also be used to denote humans as a general category. For example, when the Tabernacle is constructed in the wilderness (Ex 35:20–29), the text describes an outpouring of donations of materials and skilled craftwork. The passage starts with a description of "the whole community of Israel" going home to get items with everyone (*kol 'ish,* literally "every man") bringing offerings. Then comes an enumeration of gifts of gold jewelry from all the men and women (*kol 'ish vi 'isha* "every man and woman") and similar gifts of silver or copper or acacia wood. Skilled crafts-women (*kol 'isha khachmat lev*, "every woman with the necessary wisdom") are then singled out for offering to weave the colored threads and linens for the coverings and priestly vestments. Finally, tribal chiefs are described offering precious stones. Citing this example, as well as others where the context leaves the reference of *'ish* indeterminate, Marc Brettler notes that translators of the term *'ish* frequently "must make a careful interpretive choice between 'man' and 'person.'"[29]

Similarly, the term *adam* serves both as the name of the first human, Adam, and as general term for a man or for a human. Johannes de Moor cites a prominent example of its use as a general

[29] Marc Brettler, "Happy is the Man who Fills his Quiver with Them (Ps. 127: 5): Constructions of Masculinities in the Psalms," in *Being a Man: Negotiating Ancient Constructs of Masculinity*, ed. Ilona Zsolnay (Abingdon, GB: Routledge, 2016), 200.

term in a passage enumerating the booty from an Israelite battle that included "a total of 32,000 human beings [*nefesh adam*], namely, females [*nashim*] who had not had carnal relations"(Num 31:35).[30]

None of contexts in which *'ish* and *adam* appear in 1 Kgs 8 suggest a narrow gendered reading. Rather, the use of quantifiers, such as the term *kol* ("all" or "every" or "each" or "any") open up the interpretation. Inclusiveness stretches to its greatest extent in the central petition IV (1 Kgs 8: 37–40):[31]

> [37]A famine—if it should come upon the land; pestilence—if it should come; blight, green-mildew, ravaging locust, grasshopper—if it should come; if his enemy should put him in straits in one of his gates; whatever [*kol*] the affliction, whatever [*kol*] the sickness: [38][for] any [*kol*] prayer, any [*kol*] plea that any [*kol*] person [*adam*] might have among any [*kol*] of your people Israel, for a person [*'ish*] knows the affliction of his heart, and spreads his palms toward this House—[39]then may you hearken in the heavens, the fixed-place of your [royal] seat; may you forgive and act, giving to each [person *'ish*] according to all [*kol*] his ways, [seeing] that you know his heart for you yourself know the heart of every [*kol*] human being [*adam*] [40]in order that they may hold you in awe all [*kol*] the days that they live on the face of the ground that you have given to our fathers.

After opening with a list of natural agricultural and medical disasters, the passage opens up to "man"-made crises caused by opponents, and then even broader afflictions. It allows for any sort of protest, seemingly including ones that fall short of articulating what's in the sufferer's heart. The passage uses asides to invoke the powers of omniscience that God will need to discern the sufferer's immediate concern ("You know his heart") as well as to weigh the relative merits in the situation ("giving to each according to all his ways").

In short, Solomon opens the door to all kinds of pleas from all kinds of individuals but acknowledges that some pleas are worthier than others and leaves it to God to sort out what each person deserves. It is distinctive of the theology of the Hebrew Bible to require people to take intentional public action to initiate an interaction with God; they manifest their standing in the covenant by turning toward the Temple, crying out, and invoking God.

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[30] Johannes C. de Moor, "The First Human Being a Male? A Response to Professor Barr," in *Recycling Biblical Figures: Papers Read at a NOSTER Colloquium in Amsterdam, 12–13 May 1997*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Jan Willem van Henten, Studies in Theology and Religion Series 1 (Leiderdop, NL: Deo, 1999), 23.

[31] This passage is from the relatively literal translation by Everett Fox, *The Early Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings,* trans., intro., comm., and notes Everett Fox, The Shocken Bible Series 2 (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 2014), 611.

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The Exclusiveness of National Personage

The explicit inclusion of foreign individuals underscores that the rest of the petitions must come from the nation of Israel. Though foreigners may convert to join the nation (as described in Ex 12:48), they are otherwise kept distinct. According to Ephraim Speiser, the term 'nation' (Hebrew *'am*) in the Hebrew Bible indicates a communal identity that is deeper than a multitude of disparate individuals. It conveys a kinship that supersedes tribes, clans or individual households and even the separate monarchies later established in Judah and Israel. However it does not convey the geo-political status of a nation-state that would be more usually connoted by the Hebrew term *goy*. As a collectivity, an *'am* can take on the characteristics of a moral agent. As Speiser says, "an *'am* can eat and drink, be faint and suffer thirst, quarrel and complain and weep, tremble or flee or hide in caves, come into the world and eventually be buried. It is a group of persons."[32] As Daniel Block indicates, the nation (*'am*) is restricted to the kin and descendants of those who experienced the exodus from Egypt and committed themselves to the covenant at Sinai (Lv 25:55).[33]

The Nature of Crises and Their Causes

Before considering what kinds of crises warrant petitions, it is important to note that 1 Kgs 8:32–51 treats the crises as either explicable (due to sin) or inexplicable (not due to sin). A balance between explicable and inexplicable crises is accomplished in the same way as that between individual and national personages.

The explicability of the petitions is based on Solomon's phrasing immediately after describing the crisis—that is, the cause term in the petition formula. (Other terms for sin may appear as part of the

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[32] Ephraim A. Speiser, "'People' and 'Nation' of Israel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 79, no. 2 (1960): 160, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3264466.

[33] Daniel I. Block, "'Israel'—'Sons of Israel': A Study in Hebrew Eponymic Usage," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 13, no. 3 (September 1984): 301–326, https://doi.org/10.1177/000842988401300305. For additional discussion of the relationship of individuals, elites, and groups within Israel, see Roy E. Gane, "The Relevance of Catherine Bell's Approach to Ritualization for Analysis of Pentateuchal Ritual Texts," in *Tracing the Ritual Body: Catherine Bell and Rituals of the Ancient Biblical World*, ed. Ada Taggar Cohen, Richard E. DeMaris, and Jonathan Schwiebert (London, GB: Clark, 2024), 50–51.

postulated responses of the petitioners.) As shown in Table 6, the crises in three petitions (II, III, and VII) are explicable because they include the phrase "because they have sinned against You" (Hebrew *yekhetu lach*). Three crises (IV, V, VI) are inexplicable because no cause at all is cited. One petition (I) arguably counts in both categories. One of the parties involved is described as "sinning" *yekheta*, but the sin is committed not against God but against another individual (*yekheta 'ish l're'ehu* "a man wrongs his fellow"). Explicable and inexplicable crises are thus numerically balanced with three-and-a-half petitions each.

Petitions mentioning sin have greater amplitude than those that don't (50% to 39%). However, as a group, the explicable sin-caused petitions do not seem positioned in highly prominent locations, coming second and third in the first triad and last in the second triad.[34]

This treatment of sin is significant because trouble in daily life was quickly taken as a sign of divine displeasure that could be attributed to sinfulness. In response, neighbors might desert, denounce, or even attack the afflicted. In the Hebrew Bible, the most frequent term for "sin," *khet*, means to "miss the mark" or "fall short." It does not necessarily mean an intentional violation of God's law. Thus access to public petition signals that even those who do sin have recourse to redemption. As Knoppers emphasizes, sin is remediable, "transgressions can be overcome"; none are "obstacles to divine compassion and action."[35]

The notion that crises might be inexplicable is even more remarkable because it presumes that God could be unaware of injustice or, even worse, aware but tolerant of it. So in petitioning against inexplicable crises, the speaker is challenging God to take notice and intervene while also making a public bid to regain a respectable standing within the society.

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[34] The petitions in the second triad all concern the relationship of the kingdom of Israel to its foreign neighbors. In V, the foreign visitor is granted access in order to encourage other nations to respect God; in VI, the nation is about to wage war on enemies; and in VII, the nation is defeated with many carried off to exile.

[35] Knoppers, "Prayer," 253. Watts argues that guilt- and sin-offerings were introduced sometime after Josiah's centralization as a means to increase Temple income. See James W. Watts, "The Historical and Literary Contexts of the Sin and Guilt Offerings," in *Text, Time, and Temple: Literary, Historical and Ritual Studies in Leviticus,* ed. Francis Landy, Leigh M. Trevaskis, and Bryan D. Bibb, (Sheffield, GB: Sheffield Phoenix, 2015), 85–93. Reprinted from James W. Watts, *Leviticus 1–10,* Historical Commentary on the Old Testament (Leuven, BE: Peeters, 2013), 309–316.

TABLE 6. 1 Kgs 8 Balance of Petitions by Cause

CAUSES OF CRISIS	AMPLITUDE (JPS English words)	
Sin/Explicable	351	50%
II. Enemy routs the nation		
III. Drought befalling multitudes . . . pardon sin of your servants, your nation		
VII. Multitudes offend God leading to exile, sin inevitable for any person . . . forgive your nation		
Both	78	11%
I. Individual offending another individual		
No Sin/Inexplicable	270	39%
IV. Calamities: famine, pestilence, sickness; oppression from an enemy (singular individual within the nation)		
V. Foreign individual seeks help		
VI. Nation wages war against enemies		

National Crises

What is striking about the distribution of explicable and inexplicable crises, as shown in Table 6, is the convergence of sin-related crises with the national personage.

The nation is afforded only one opportunity to petition without any imputation of sin—in Petition VI (1 Kgs 8:44–45). In this case, Israel is depicted going to battle with an as yet unknown outcome (see Table 7). This kind of situation is evoked in Ps 20, in which a speaker calls on God to recognize and reward the merits of a leader, concluding by expressing confidence in a military victory that has not yet occurred. Likewise, Ps 83 depicts enemy nations plotting against Israel but battle has not yet been engaged; the speaker pleads to God to treat these enemies like other previously defeated enemies.

Military crises are also the topic of two other petitions pertaining to the nation. Petition II and Petition VII both refer to military defeats, the latter from an enemy powerful enough to carry off substantial numbers of captives into exile. Both crises are explicable, resulting from the nation's sins against God. As shown in Table 7, Petitions II and VII describe quite similar situations but differ in detail and amplitude.

Petition VII is clearly more significant; as shown in Table 7 it actually has the greatest amplitude of any petition and occupies the prominent last position. It provides a detailed prescription for the content of a petition when sin is involved, as well as the most elaborated argument for why God should hear and grant a petition, and even includes a stop-gap plea for the captors to treat the exiles mercifully until God does rescue them.

TABLE 7. National Petitions with Inexplicable (Non-Sin) and Explicable (Sin-Caused) Crises

Inexplicable Crisis VI: Prospective War, 1 Kgs 8:44–45

[44]When Your people take the field against their enemy by whatever way You send them, and they pray to GOD in the direction of the city that You have chosen, and of the House that I have built to Your name, [45]oh, hear in heaven their prayer and supplication and uphold their cause.

Explicable Crisis II: Military Defeat, 1 Kgs 8:33–34

[33]Should Your people Israel be routed by an enemy because they have sinned against You, and then turn back to You and acknowledge Your name, and they offer prayer and supplication to You in this House, [34]oh, hear in heaven and pardon the sin of Your people Israel, and restore them to the land that You gave to their ancestors.

Explicable Crisis VII, Military Defeat and Exile, 1 Kgs 8:46–51

[46]When they sin against You—for there is no mortal who does not sin—and You are angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and their captors carry them off to an enemy land, near or far; [47]and then they take it to heart in the land to which they have been carried off, and they repent and make supplication to You in the land of their captors, saying: 'We have sinned, we have acted perversely, we have acted wickedly,' [48]and they turn back to You with all their heart and soul, in the land of the enemies who have carried them off, and they pray to You in the direction of their land that You gave to their ancestors, of the city that You have chosen, and of the House that I have built to Your name—[49]oh, give heed in Your heavenly abode to their prayer and supplication, uphold their cause, [50]and pardon Your people who have sinned against You for all the transgressions that they have committed against You. Grant them mercy in the sight of their captors that they may be merciful to them. [51]For they are Your very own people that You freed from Egypt, from the midst of the iron furnace.

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The final explicable crisis is drought (III). Widespread drought and other crop failures were associated with disloyalty to a suzerain in other Ancient Near Eastern cultures.[36] The connection between drought and sin in the Hebrew Bible is made explicit for individuals in Lev 26:14–39 and for the nation in Deut 11:13–17 where Israelites are warned that agriculture bounty in their promised land depends on their loyalty to God: "Take care not to be lured away to serve other gods and bow to them. For GOD's anger will flare up against you, shutting up the skies so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its produce; and you will soon perish from the good land that GOD is assigning to you." To avoid this outcome, Israelites are commanded in the Shema liturgy—both as individuals and as the nations—to remind themselves daily of their commitment to God, by speaking of it regularly, impressing it on their children, posting textual reminders on their doorposts and gates, and adding visual symbols to their clothing.[37] Notably, not all agricultural disasters are ascribed to sin. The central petition IV, cites famine, blight, mildew, locusts and caterpillars; the petitioner is an individual and sin is not mentioned.

Overall, military loss with exile to a foreign country thus represents the ultimate crisis for the nation, graver than a military defeat that represents loss of territory or loss of national autonomy. Remarkably, the covenant is not taken as a guarantee that such catastrophes will never happen. Rather God is represented as allowing defeat to happen or even bringing it about.

Individual Crises

The corollary to the association of sin with the national personage is that 1 Kgs 8 has no petitions for sinful individuals. The only petition for individuals that includes the term for sin is the first one (I) in which one person wrongs a fellow human being, not God. Obviously, the omission is not due to absence of sinning. As noted in

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[36] Sara Kipfer, "'You Eat, but you Never Have Enough . . .': Fear of Famine and Food Shortage in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East," *Die Welt des Orients* 51, no. 1 (2021): 58–83, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/27095050. Aurelian Botica, "Weather, Agriculture, and Religion in the Ancient Near East and in the Old Testament," *Perichoresis* 11, no. 1 (2013): 95–122, https://doi.org/10.2478/perc-2013–0005.

[37] Reuven Kimelman, "The Shema: Instructions for a Romance with YHWH." TheTorah.com. (2022), sec. 6 "A Romance with God," https://www.thetorah.com/article/the-shema-instructions-for-a-romance-with-yhwh.

Petition VII, “there is no person (*adam*) who doesn't sin” (v. 46). Nor does the omission signal a lack of recourse to God for sinful individuals. Rather other ritual actions were required—specifically, guilt and purification sacrifices. Elsewhere I argue that these sacrifices required discourse that was not preserved or couched in the poetic language of the psalms (except for Ps. 51).[38] These rituals obviated the need for persuasive petitions. But the outcome was not necessarily satisfactory. Even after performing the appropriate sacrifice, individuals might still find themselves in dire straits. With sin ruled out as the cause of the crisis, the crisis becomes inexplicable. Presumably individuals cleared of sin were then considered authorized to petition God and to assume a stance of innocence. Limiting petitions to the innocent seems to have been unique in the ANE. As noted by Patrick and Diable, petition-letters from individuals in other ANE cultures admitted and apologized for guilt—such as offending their personal god—and implored other gods to intervene on their behalfs. But “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.”[39]

Whereas the nation was authorized to petition in multiple crises that centered on military encounters, individuals—apart from the foreign visitor—have are a wide array of situations in which to petition, including those involving a human culprit or opponent (Petitions I and IV). These wrongs may lie beyond the jurisdiction of the legal system or are suffered by people who have exhausted other remedies. What is inexplicable is why a just and attentive God has allowed such an opponent to prevail over individuals convinced that they are innocent and in the right. Of course, the situation may look completely different from the opponent's perspective; an opponent who may also be free to petition God.

In the two petitions involving disputes with other people, it may seem that one is completely in the right and the other in the wrong. Certainly, this is the way disputes are framed in many psalms. However, both petitions include qualified language that admits the possibility that the two sides may share in the blame: Petition I, v. 32 describes God “rewarding them according to their righteousness”

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[38] See Charney, “Centrality of Individual Petitions,” 531–533.

[39] Dale Patrick and Ken Diable, “Persuading the One and Only God to Intervene,” in *My Words are Lovely: Studies in the Rhetoric of the Psalms*, ed. Robert Foster and David M. Howard Jr. (London, GB: Clark, 2008), 21.

and Petition IV, v. 39 “giving to each [person *'ish*] according to all [*kol*] his ways.” These qualifiers suggest a level of consciousness that the world is messy, the people in it are complicated, that wrong-doing and righteousness are not absolute, and crises may not be resolved in completely satisfactory ways.

Conclusion

In sum, petitions to God are literally of central importance in the ceremony of dedicating the Temple. In Knoppers' chiastic scheme (Table 1) that divides the ceremony into seven steps, the petitions occupy central position, take up more than a third of the textual amplitude (Table 2), and are described in language with the slowest narrative time—with detailed descriptions of Solomon's gestures and changes in posture as well as verbatim quotation of lengthy petitions.

Solomon's prayer authorizes an array of petitions from people in diverse circumstances and locations who are facing some sort of crisis—from gross injustices to life-threatening calamities. By several measures, petitions from individuals are presented as equal to or more important than petitions from the nation. The same number of petitions—three-and-one-half—are devoted to each and the uniform prose style of the petitions keeps the narrative time equivalent for both. But petitions for the individual come first in each triad (Step 6 and 6′ in Table 1) as well as taking the central position between the triads (Step 7). The petitions for individuals also take up greater amplitude (Table 5).

Giving individuals the same or more weight as the nation may reflect “facts on the ground”—that the commerce of the Temple depended on the offerings of individuals and that the forging of a faithful community comes from attending to the everyday conflicts that individuals suffer. The notion that it is sufficient to turn toward the Temple is consonant with the shift from local shrines to the centralized Temple in Jerusalem, while it also provides for those drawn or forced outside the country.

In an oral society where prayer is expected to be uttered aloud—as Solomon's is—individuals are empowered to take public action, to appeal to God to judge the merits of their cases. As emphasized in the aside in v. 38, only the sufferer knows the nature of his or her affliction. Solomon calls on God to hear and respond favorably but gives no guarantee that a response will come soon or that it will be satisfactory.

Public oral petition is a way for groups and individuals to declare their faith—and to challenge its basis. It is a form of epideictic rhetoric, discourse that sustains and shapes shared cultural values. Public petitions are culturally important because they demonstrate the speakers' own faithfulness and encourage faithfulness in others. Moreover they give individuals public opportunities to deal with setbacks and negotiate their social status while interacting with a God who is perceived as open to persuasion.[40]

[40] My thanks to Jeanne Fahnestock and Ted Hildebrandt for helpfully commenting on earlier versions of this article.