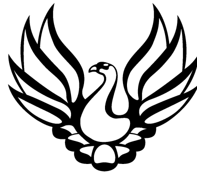
Persuading God

Rhetorical Studies of First-Person Psalms

Davida H. Charney



Sheffield Phoenix Press

2015

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Published by Sheffield Phoenix Press
Department of Biblical Studies, University of Sheffield
Sheffield S3 7QB

www.sheffieldphoenix.com

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A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library

Typeset by CA Typesetting Ltd
Printed on acid-free paper by Lightning Source

ISBN 978-1-909697-80-5
ISSN 1747-9614

Contents

Preface ix
Tables and Figures x
Acknowledgments xi
Abbreviations xii

Introduction 1
- Psalms as Arguments in the Israelite Public Sphere 1
- Beyond Psychologizing the Speaker 5
- Beyond Presuming Piety 8
- Distinguishing Rhetorical and Literary Analyses 10
- Ancient and Contemporary Rhetorical Theory 11
- Toward a Rhetorical Theory of the Psalms 12
- Stances Toward God 14
- A Note on Translations 16

Chapter 1
Praise as Divine Currency 17
- Praise as Negotiable Currency 20
- Psalm 71: Extending the Supply of Praise 25
- Praise as a Charged Current 29
- Psalm 16: Balancing with God's Guidance 30
- Psalm 26: Ongoing Refinement 32
- Psalm 131: Bragging on Quietism 35

Chapter 2
Instructions for Keeping Faith 39
- Two Pieces of Rhetorical Theory: Amplitude and Identification 39
- Psalm 4: A Seven-Step Recovery Program 41
- Psalm 62: Restoring the Expletive 47
- Psalm 82: Persuading Gods 52
- Conclusion: Bait and Switch? 54

Chapter 3
The Lament as Proposal 56
- Psalm 54: Invoking Action 58
- Psalm 13: Questioning Absence 59
- Absence of Amplitude 61

Chapter 4
SONGS OF INNOCENCE 65
Psalm 44: God's Breach of Covenant 65
Psalm 22: From Worm to Champion 71
Psalm 17: Assertions of Godliness 76
Conclusion 81

Chapter 5
THE KAIROS OF CURSES 83
Psalm 7: Measured Innocence 86
Psalm 35: Paying Back in Kind 92
Psalm 109: Returning Curse for Curse 98
Conclusion 109

Chapter 6
RECOVERING FROM GUILT 111
The Discourse of Guilt 112
Psalm 130: Proclaiming Patience 113
Psalm 38: Eloquently Inarticulate 116
Psalm 51: An Action-Oriented Confession 120
Conclusion 125

Chapter 7
SELF-PERSUASION AND WISDOM 127
Psalm 77: Reimagining the Past 128
Psalm 73: Speaking Internally and Externally 135
Discipline and Persuasion 142

Bibliography 143
Index of References 150
Index of Rhetorical Terms 154
Index of Authors 155

Chapter 1

Praise as Divine Currency

The overwhelming purpose of the psalms is to praise God. Many psalms are designated in their superscriptions as תהלים *tehilim* ‘praises’. The same root, הלל *hll*, recurs in the refrain הללויה *hallelu-yah*, ‘praise God’, that simultaneously expresses and commands praise from the multitudes. The psalms abound in verbs for praising: bless, declare, exalt, extol, honor, magnify, proclaim, shout, sing, speak, tell, and so on. In short, as Patrick Miller notes, ‘praise is not one item on a long list of elements that belonged to the proper or normative prayer in the Old Testament, it is the very heart of the matter’.[1] The point is so obvious that we seldom question its underlying assumptions. Why is praise so important? Why does God need or desire praise? Doesn’t omniscience render praise unnecessary for distinguishing the righteous from the wicked? While these theological questions go beyond the scope of this book, I contend that the psalms themselves provide important evidence of how ancient Israelites conceived of God’s need for praise and how they leveraged praise to persuade God to intervene in their daily lives.

Many biblical scholars see the praise of ancient Israelites in psychological terms, as a natural, instinctive and perhaps irrepressible human outpouring of emotion, gratitude and awe. But Moshe Greenberg goes further to trace through the psalms a growing sophistication in how Israelites conceived of the divine, moving away from the beliefs of neighboring societies that the gods depended on sacrifices for nourishment and were susceptible to flattery. In Israel, Greenberg writes, ‘prayer became a vehicle of humility, an expression of un-self-sufficiency, which, in biblical thought, is the proper stance of man before God’.[2] Pointing to psalms that rate sacrifice lower than public praise (e.g., Pss. 40.7-11, 50.13, 51.17, 69.31), Greenberg argues that, for Israelites, what God desires is the public proclamation of this dependency, for each person to publish abroad ‘how he called

1. Patrick D. Miller, ‘“Enthroned on the Praises of Israel”: The Praise of God in Old Testament Theology’, *Int* 39 (1985), pp. 5-19 (6).

2. Moshe Greenberg, ‘On the Refinement of the Conception of Prayer in Hebrew Scriptures’, *AJS Review* 1 (1976), pp. 57-92 (90).

upon God in distress and how God heard and delivered him'.[3] The purpose of praise, as Greenberg sees it, is to shape and release the emotions of individual speakers and hearers; even when a psalm was composed long ago under different circumstances, the prayer 'gives shape to the feelings of later generations and conserves in them the values of the founders'.[4] In this view, composing psalms, delivering them in public, hearing or reading them, singing them or hearing them sung, reinforces the proper Israelite stance of humility and gratitude before God and perpetuates it by passing it down through the generations. Individuals devoted to praising God may strive to emulate God's qualities and cherish God's commandments, fostering lawful, ethical behavior and adherence to distinctly Israelite rituals and practices.

The idea that praise shores up a culture's traditional values is a familiar one for scholars of rhetoric, who use the term 'epideictic' for the public discourse of praise and blame. In Aristotle's formulation (from fourth century BCE Athens), *epideictic* rhetoric focuses on the current state of affairs whereas *forensic* rhetoric, the discourse of the courtroom, deals with arguments over what happened in the past, and *deliberative* rhetoric, the discourse of the legislature, deals with arguments about what should happen in the future.[5] For modern scholars, Aristotle's tidy formulation is flawed because it discounts epideictic relative to forensic and deliberative discourse; confines epideictic too narrowly to staged ceremonial occasions such as funerals, dedications of public spaces and pageants for victorious athletes or warriors; over-emphasizes showiness in epideictic speeches while downplaying their ideological impact; and positions the audience as passive spectators with nothing to decide on except the entertainment value of the speech and the virtues of its highly paid author.[6] In the ancient Greek democracy, audiences at epideictic ceremonies are less engaged than those in a courtroom or assembly because epideictic presents no issues for them to debate further and decide by means of a vote. Nothing vital seems to be at stake except for the prestige of the speaker and the size of the purse he or she can command.

The limited public situations in which epideictic occurred in ancient Greece, mainly formal ceremonial events, make epideictic seem less challenging than deliberative or forensic discourse. The art of persuasion lies

3. Greenberg, 'On the Refinement', p. 78.

4. Greenberg, 'On the Refinement', p. 89.

5. Aristotle, *On Rhetoric* 1358b.

6. For recent discussions see Jonathan Pratt, 'The Epideictic *Agōn* and Aristotle's Elusive Third Genre', *AJP* 133 (2012), pp. 177-208; Edward Schiappa and David M. Timmerman, 'Aristotle's Disciplining of Epideictic', in Edward Schiappa, *The Beginnings of Rhetorical Theory in Ancient Greece* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 185-206.

in changing a hearer's attitudes, beliefs or actions, but little change seems needed in praising values that the society already accepts. As Jonathan Pratt puts it,

> The epideictic spectator is expected to have his mind made up, or, at the very least, to be inclined to go along with the speaker's every argument. His job is not, it would seem, to offer resistance. This being so, how could the auditor be said to exercise judgment at all? If nothing is easier than praising Athenians in Athens, as Plato's Socrates puts it, then what need is there for an art of epideictic rhetoric?[7]

The biggest risk for the speaker, according to Pratt, is being judged against speeches that others might have made or did make in similar situations: 'the *theoros* [spectator] decides among a single delivered speech and other, imagined or remembered speeches advancing the same thesis'.[8]

In ancient Israel, however, the range of public situations available for epideictic is broader and reveals more of its potential. Obviously, many psalms were performed in cultic situations in front of spectators, situations that called for what Claus Westermann designates as descriptive praise of God's essential nature.[9] As in Greek epideictic, hymnic psalms assume agreement on the ultimate value of the object of praise, namely God. These psalms are sometimes addressed to God directly and sometimes to the spectators, exhorting them to praise God. In either case, God serves both as the object of praise and as audience; it is God's judgment of the praise that counts. At stake is God's relationship with Israel because praise is one of the primary means whereby Israel maintains its status as a faithful partner in the covenant. As Pratt notes, 'Well-wrought praise enhances the status of giver and recipient alike, to the point of assimilating the former's words to the latter's deeds'.[10] Performing the psalms in public is both a faith activity and a spot of regular maintenance work, continually rehearsing the key values that must be adhered to by both parties to the covenant, God and the Israelites.

A more complex form of praise is offered in the first-person psalms, including what Westermann called declarative praise of God's actions on behalf of individuals. In ancient Israel, the course of an individual's life was taken to reflect his or her relations with God. Illness, defeat, failure

7. Pratt, 'The Epideictic *Agōn*', p. 190

8. Pratt, 'The Epideictic *Agōn*', p. 203. Archaic Greece did have some situations in which epideictic discourse from a variety of speakers was addressed to the object of praise: in private symposia, a potential lover might be solicited by a variety of suitors. For example, see Walker's discussion of the 'Speech of Lysias' in *Rhetoric and Poetics*, p. 146.

9. Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (trans. Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen; Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1981).

10. Pratt, 'The Epideictic *Agōn*', p. 202.

and disgrace were taken as signs of God's punishment or at least abandonment. Therefore an Israelite's relationship with God was a matter of everyday concern; much was at risk. In good times, they took care to stay on good terms with God through freewill offerings, celebrating and maintaining the relationship with what scholars call 'psalms of trust', such as Psalm 23. If they got off track, they sought to regain their standing through purification rituals or expiation offerings; these rituals seem rarely to have been accompanied by psalms, though there are a few that plead for forgiveness, such as Psalm 38. The majority of first-person psalms either appeal to God for help or thank God for help received. The former, termed 'laments' or 'petitions', seek God's intervention in everyday affairs in times of conflict and in dire crises. At these times, all that Israelites have to offer in return for rescue is thanksgiving and praise. Laments promise future praise when rescue is secured; thanksgivings often describe a past crisis along with praise and gratitude for rescue.

This alternation from steady state to crisis to repair work, all via psalms, is what Walter Brueggemann terms orientation, disorientation and reorientation. Yet, even while he fully appreciates their psychological importance, Brueggemann finds laments and thanksgiving psalms more interesting than the orientation psalms,

> for there is in them no great movement, no tension to resolve. Indeed what mainly characterizes them is the absence of tension. The mind-set and world-view of those who enjoy a serene location of their lives is a sense of orderliness, goodness, and reliability of life.[11]

The goal of this chapter is to complicate this picture by demonstrating that Israelites placed little value on complacency and serenity; rather, even at the best of times, Israelite speakers are well aware of the precariousness of their paths and the need to use praise actively to maintain their balance. As a result, these psalms underscore a continuing need for engagement between individual Israelites and God. This point is developed by exploring two different senses in which Israelites treat praise as currency, the first in which praise is treated as a negotiable medium of exchange and the second in which praise extends a relationship that is current, that is timely, that is ever-present.

Praise as Negotiable Currency

In treating praise as a negotiable currency, speakers leverage God's need or desire for praise; on the one hand, they tender praise as a reason for God to help or save them; on the other hand, they threaten God with the cessation

11. Brueggemann, 'Psalms and the Life of Faith', p. 6.

or absence of praise. The threat is veiled but it is there and it is most palpable in a speaker's references to death, to wicked opponents and to God's world-wide reputation for justice and faithfulness.[12]

Death: Depriving God of Praise

For Israelites, the silence of the grave deprives God of praise. Like their neighbors in the ancient Near East, Israelites had a conception of an afterlife, though several of its qualities are unique. The dead reside without possessions or rank in a realm called Sheol where God has dominion but where the dead do not have access to God's presence and cannot communicate with God. This conception of death puts a premium on life both for God and for Israelites. As the following verses indicate, only the living can supply the praise that God needs or wants.

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?
Ps. 115.17-18	The dead do not praise the LORD nor all who go down into silence. But we will bless Yah now and forevermore, hallelujah.

Death in these verses is not the terrifying danger or unfair punishment that it is elsewhere; instead death is what prevents God from receiving praise, from public oral celebration of God's truth, God's wonders, God's faithfulness, God's kindness. Thus the death of the speaker threatens God with the loss of praise. Of course the threat is stated indirectly in these verses—using the interrogative—because the speakers are addressing a far more powerful hearer.

The speakers in these passages do not claim that their praise has any unique quality, any special eloquence or insight or musicianship (though a case of this special pleading arises in Psalm 71, discussed later in this

12. In a similar analysis of several of this chapter's examples in her book, *Language, Power, and Identity in the Lament Psalms of the Individual* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2008), Amy C. Cottrill argues that the relationship between God and the individual is one of patron and client. The client praises the patron to maintain the relationship, but turns to complaint/petition in times of trouble. The patron's reputation is at stake if the client is abandoned or treated shabbily. In addition to rhetorical theory, Cottrill draws on modern sociological studies. While I find her approach congenial to my own, Cottrill does not work out some of the limitations of the patron/client model, particularly the absence in Israelite culture of legitimate alternative patrons. She also tends to treat the psalms as a form of therapeutic 'role-playing' (p. 26), rather than as authentic discourse.

chapter). Rather, the speakers identify with all who perish. Perhaps claims for special eloquence were omitted because they would detract from the expected stance of humility. Perhaps they were excised in the reworking and reuse of a psalm. Or perhaps claims to eloquence didn't apply to a speaker who commissioned the psalm from a professional. In any case, the effect is a sense of egalitarianism; it is not that *this* speaker's praise is especially valuable to God but that the death of faithful Israelites in general is a loss, reducing the number of people capable of offering praise and thereby reducing the overall amount of praise.

Leveraging Praise as a quid pro quo

In addition to noting that the dead cannot praise, speakers also ask explicitly to be rescued in order to praise God, as in Pss. 51.16-17 and 9.14-15. Praise is the reason for God to act.

Ps. 51.16-17	Save me from bloodshed, O God, God of my rescue. Let my tongue sing out Your bounty. O Master, open my lips, that my mouth may tell Your praise.
Ps. 9.14-15	Grant me grace, O LORD, see my torment by my foes, You who raise me from the gates of death. So that I may tell all your praise in the gates of the Daughter of Zion. Let me exult in your rescue.

A bargain is also evident apart from references to death. The characteristic final promise of praise at the end of a lament 'always carries the inference of conditionality' as Ellen Davis notes in her analysis of Psalm 22.[13] Speakers also refer to praise as the repayment of a debt or fulfillment of a נדר ('vow'), as if praise was part of the price for God's protection or rescue. The terms of repayment are most blatant in Psalm 116, where the speaker at first seems to take God's response for granted because of how regularly God has responded to his call.

Ps. 116.1-2	I love the LORD for He has heard my voice, my supplications. For He has inclined His ear to me when in my days I called.
Ps. 116.12-14	What can I give back to the LORD for all He requited to me? The cup of rescue I lift and in the name of the LORD I call. My vows to the LORD I shall pay in the sight of all His people.
Ps. 116.17-19	To You I shall offer a thanksgiving sacrifice and in the name of the LORD I shall call. My vows to the LORD I shall pay in the sight of all His people, in the courts of the house of the LORD, in the midst of Jerusalem. Hallelujah.

13. Ellen F. Davis, 'Exploding the Limits: Form and Function in Psalm 22', *JSOT* 53 (1992), pp. 93-105 (100).

The speaker in Psalm 116 makes no great case for his innocence, righteousness or faithfulness as do other speakers (see Chapter 4). God's rescue, in other words, is not contingent on the speaker's special worthiness for rescue, but rather on a habitual system of give and take.[14]

Psalm 30.10 is especially daring in suggesting that God benefits in some material way from praise. The speaker asks מה בצע בדמי ('what profit') there is to God in the speaker's death. In the Hebrew Bible, the word בצע ('profit' or 'material gain') consistently has a negative connotation, associated with greed and covetousness. In Gen. 37.26, Judah asks his brothers the same question in order to convince them to sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites instead of killing him: מה בצע כי נהרג את אחינו ('what do we gain by killing our brother?') By analogy, in Ps. 30.10, God is urged to spare the innocent Joseph-like speaker and to top the behavior of Joseph's crass brothers who profited only in dollars-and-cents terms. As in other laments, the speaker appeals to God's better nature, calling on God to be worthy of the praise. In complex situations, where the merits of the speaker are not perfectly clear, the challenge to God's championship of justice becomes ever more explicit.

It would be a mistake to think of this quid pro quo as a primitive form of thinking. It is clear that the psalmists were not expecting God to respond in the form of a voice or lightning bolt from the heavens. Rather, Israelites interpreted God's response from subsequent events: those who see events turn in their favor go on to offer psalms of thanksgiving to God, while those whose troubles persist have the option to go on petitioning and lamenting, seeking even more persuasive ways to move God to respond. The important social and cultural element is crediting God for their success or failure rather than themselves or other human agents.

Contending with Other Israelites and Non-Believers

The corollary to the notion that God is deprived by the absence of praise is that God suffers from the opposite of praise: taunting and disbelief. Thus when the wicked taunt the afflicted Israelite, asking 'where is your God?' the insult serves multiple purposes. It documents the faithfulness of the speaker who persists in calling on God and it raises the stakes for God. If the wicked vanquish the speaker, his or her praise is stifled, replaced by an arrogant victor who is unlikely to provide any praise and it leaves unchallenged the taunt that God is faithless or tolerates injustice.

Ps. 13.4-5 Regard, answer me, LORD, my God. Light up my eyes, lest I sleep death, lest my enemy say, 'I've prevailed over him', lest my foes exult when I stumble.

14. I point to some ways in which this rather presumptuous speaker is taken down a peg or two in Charney, 'Performativity and Persuasion', pp. 247-68.

Ps. 42.11	With murder in my bones, my enemies revile me when they say to me all day long, 'Where is your God?'
Ps. 57.4	He will send from the heavens and rescue me—he who tramples me reviled me—God will send his steadfast kindness.[15]

Opponents appear often in the psalms. But our only knowledge of them comes through the lens of a far from disinterested speaker, who represents the situation to God as a simple exchange of praise for rescue of the only innocent and faithful person involved. But a much more interesting picture emerges from allowing for the very plausible situation that the speaker is locked in a dispute with other ordinary Israelites who might themselves have praise to offer. Rather than a hero and a villain, both sides may have some right on their side, both may have contributed to the trouble. Few scholars have recognized that the characters of both speaker and opponents remain arguable, preferring to see the opponents as aliens or as irredeemably wicked apostates. The psalms themselves do not highlight the competitive nature of the situation; only in a few cases, such as Psalms 35 and 55, does the opponent's status as an Israelite emerge clearly.

Speakers competing with other Israelites are apt, not surprisingly, to characterize opponents as incapable of true praise. The wicked do not simply do evil things; they are abhorrent because they reject God's values and their speech discredits God. They are arrogant, believing themselves to be self-sufficient, rock-steady and beyond God's reach; those who take responsibility for their own successes or failures have no reason to praise God.

Ps. 5.9-10	Guide me, O LORD, in your righteousness. On account of my foes, make my way straight before me. For there is nothing right in their mouths, within them—falsehood. An open grave their throat, their tongue, smooth-talking.
Ps. 10.3-7	For the wicked did vaunt in his very lust, grasping for gain—cursed, blasphemed the LORD. The wicked sought not in his towering wrath—'There is no God' is all his schemes. His ways are uncertain in every hour, Your judgments are high above him. All his foes he enflames. He said in his heart, 'I will not stumble, for all time I will not come to harm'. His mouth is full of oaths, beneath his tongue are guile and deceit, mischief, and misdeed.
Ps. 28.3	Do not pull me down with the wicked and with the wrongdoers who speak peace to their fellows with foulness in their hearts.
Ps. 54.5	For strangers have risen against me, and oppressors have sought my life. They did not set God before them.

15. Paul Raabe notes concerning this verse that the direct object of 'revile' is unstated, leaving it ambiguous whether it is the speaker or God whom the enemy is reviling. See Raabe's 'Deliberate Ambiguity in the Psalter', *JBL* 110 (1991), pp. 213-27 (220).

The opponents' words are not to be trusted; they lie in giving false reports of the speaker or speak fair words aloud but foul words in their hearts. In characterizing their opponents in these terms, the speakers seek to narrow God's options. Only rescue of the speaker insures praise.

Psalm 71: Extending the Supply of Praise

All Israelites of course are mortal and therefore the eventual silencing of each individual Israelite is inevitable. Insuring an endless supply of praise, therefore, requires the perpetuation of the people of Israel over time. Accordingly special potency accrues to promises to extend the number of praise-givers beyond the individual speaker, as in the closing section of Psalm 22.

Ps. 22.23-24, 31-32	Let me tell Your name to my brothers, in the assembly let me praise You. Fearers of the LORD, O praise Him! All the seed of Jacob revere Him! … My seed will serve Him. It will be told to generations to come. They will proclaim His bounty to a people aborning, for He has done.

Here the speaker moves from expressing his own praise to exhorting praise from his family, the larger tribe, the children of Jacob, other nations and generations to come.

The potency of extending praise to future generations comes to its fullest expression in Psalm 71. The speaker argues that he is worthy of rescue because of his life-long history as an exemplary praise-giver, a practice that he wants to continue to perpetuate to future generations.

PSALM 71[16]

1 In You, O LORD, I shelter. Let me never be shamed.

2 Through Your bounty save me and free me. Incline Your ear to me and rescue me.

3 Be for me a fortress-dwelling to come into always. You ordained to rescue me, for You are my rock and my bastion.

4 My God, free me from the hand of the wicked, from the grip of the wicked and the violent.

5 For You are my hope, Master, O LORD, my refuge since youth.

6 Upon You I relied from birth. From my mother's womb You brought me out. To You is my praise always.

7 An example I was to the many, and You are my sheltering strength.

8 May my mouth be filled with Your praise, all day long Your glory.

16. Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation and Commentary* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), pp. 244-47.

9 Do not fling me away in old age, as my strength fails, do not forsake me.
10 For my enemies said of me, who stalk me counseled together,
11 saying, 'God has forsaken him. Pursue and catch him, for no one will save him'.
12 God, do not keep far from me. My God, hasten to my help!
13 May my accusers be shamed, may they perish [my life's opponents]—may they be clothed with shame and reproach who seek my harm.
14 As for me, I shall always hope and add to all Your praise.
15 My mouth will recount Your bounty, all day long Your rescue, for I know not numbers.
16 I shall come in the power of the Master, the LORD. I shall call to mind Your bounty—You only.
17 God, You have taught me since my youth and till now I have told Your wonders.
18 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,
19 and Your bounty, O God, to the heights, as You have done great things, O God, who is like You?
20 As you surfeited me with great and dire distress, You will once more give me life, and from the earth's depths once more bring me up.
21 You will multiply my greatness and turn round and comfort me.
22 And so I shall acclaim You with the lute.—Your truth, my God. Let me hymn You with the lyre, Israel's Holy One.
23 My lips will sing glad song when I hymn to You, and my being that You ransomed.
24 My tongue, too, all day long will murmur Your bounty. For they are shamed, for they are disgraced, those who sought my harm.

Psalm 71 has been relatively neglected by scholars; some downgrade its originality, pointing to the numerous passages that echo or are echoed in other psalms.[17] However, when seen as part of an overall strategy to leverage the availability of praise, these repetitions actually strengthen the persuasiveness of the psalm.

The structure of the psalm, as shown in Figure 1.1, consists of six sections of about four verses each. As in most petitionary psalms, the speaker's first task is to address the hearer, God, in terms that will capture attention and foster a positive attitude. In this case, the address in vv. 1-4 encapsulates the main argument: the speaker's past reliance on God as a refuge supports his worthiness for current and future rescue.

17. Hans-Joachim Kraus tries to present this intertextual aspect of Psalm 71 in a positive light, yet he persists in taking it as a kind of 'prayer formulary with which a definite type of oppressed person was able to bring his distress and petition before Yahweh'. See H.-J. Kraus, *Psalms 60–150* (trans. H.C. Hilton; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), p. 72.

1-4	*Address:* Plea to God for attention and rescue
5-9	*Past praise:* Reminder of reliance on and praise of God, from birth to old age
10-13	Denunciation of opponents
14-16	*Future praise:* Promise of constant, exclusive faith and public praise in own life
17-19	Future praise in days to come: Promise to train next generation to praise
20-24	*Current praise*: Promise to sing praise now in response to rescue and humiliation of opponents.

Figure 1.1. *Structure of Psalm 71*

As the structure suggests, all but one of the sections after the address catalog the stages of life during which the speaker has praised, does praise and will praise God. This lifetime of experience is of value to God both because the speaker has extended praise to others in his own circle during his lifetime and because the speaker promises to raise new generations of praise-givers. The centrality of praise is underscored by the progression of different verb forms for the act of praising that plays out across the sections.

In the second section, vv. 5-9, the speaker reminds God that their relationship began at the moment of the speaker's birth and that, since then, he has stood out for his praise of God. The speaker's praise תהילתי ('my praise') has only been directed to God in v. 6. In v. 7, the speaker characterizes himself as a good influence on others in describing himself as מופת ('an example') to many. The term מופת is usually used in the context of God's miraculous 'signs and wonders'. The only other people to whom it is applied are the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel.[18] In the context of Psalm 71, then, the speaker claims to be modeling the type of relationship of protection and praise that the whole nation should emulate. He prays or predicts that his mouth will always be filled with תהילתך ('your praise') and תפארתך ('your glory') in v. 8.

The only obstacles are the speaker's old age (v. 9) and the looming threat from opponents, described in the third section, vv. 10-13. As usual, the opponents are depicted as mortal enemies taunting the speaker. The public standing of these antagonists is a zero-sum game: either the speaker or the opponents must remain shamed and reviled or die.

The fourth section, vv. 14-16, uses a new set of praise terms to signal that the speaker's response to rescue from the current threat will surpass his previous efforts. The speaker promises in succession הוספתי את כל תהילתך ('add to all your praise') to elaborate or extend the amount of praise (v. 14), יספר צדקתך ('recount your bounty') to list out or enumerate your bounty to

18. Isa. 8.18, 20.3 and Ezek. 12.6, 12.11, 24.24, 24.27. The term is sometimes taken negatively as a 'portent' to reflect the speaker's history of troubles from opponents. For example, Kraus (*Psalms 60–150*, p. 72). See also Bill Blackburn, 'Psalm 71', *RevExp* 88 (1991), pp. 241-45.

others (v. 15), and אזכיר צדקתך ('call to mind your bounty'), to cause oneself or more likely others to remember your bounty or justice.

The fifth section, vv. 17-19, spells out the promise to train future generations to praise God in the same lifelong way from birth to old age, using praise terms that connote declaring, publishing or making known. The speaker has אגיד נפלאותיך ('told of your wonders') and asks for his life to be extended in order to אגיד זרועך לדור ('tell of your mighty arm to the next generation') and לכל יבוא גבורתך ('your power to all who will come').

Finally, the sixth section, vv. 20-24, shows off the speaker's musical powers, promising to thank God for rescue from the current crisis with songs of thanks, אודך בכלי נבל ('acclaim you with the lute') and לך בכנור אזמרה ('hymn you with the lyre') (v. 22), to use lips and tongue in song, תרננה שפתי ('my lips will sing glad songs') (v. 23) and כל היום תהגה צדקתך לשוני ('my tongue, too, all day long will murmur Your bounty'). The progression of types of praise reaches its crescendo at the conclusion, leading to the downfall of the foes. In the end, the speaker aggrandizes his own abilities as a singer of praise in order to convince God that it is worthwhile to preserve his life.[19]

Psalm 71, then, takes praise as both its subject and as its most persuasive tactic. As Susan Stewart notes of all poems of praise, praise is a gift that adds glory to its subject by its very incapacity to exhaust the possibilities of praise: 'Praise is affirmative—it reveals, augments, and at the same time creates surpluses in excess of what it discloses.'[20] A poem of praise, like Psalm 71, fulfills its promise as it continues to be published and performed and as it resonates with representations of other texts, old and new. As Stewart puts it, 'the ode gathers an accumulating knowledge in time; it makes absent things present by recalling them rather than by manifesting them'. In this way, the reuse of verses from other psalms adds to rather than detracts from the power of Psalm 71.

Ancient Israelites use the provision of praise to position themselves in advantageous ways relative to God whom they assume to be shaping a dynamic ongoing relationship with their community. At stake in most first-person psalms is an individual's personal relationship with God, on whom the individual relies for health, security and happiness. As suggested

19. The lack of specific identifying information about either the author or the speaker in the psalms (leaving aside the superscriptions) is a stark contrast to the attribution of texts in ancient Greece where, as David Carr notes, 'the authority of cultural texts often seems to reside in the authorial personages themselves: Homer, Hesiod, Aeschylus, and other key poets'. See David Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 107.

20. Susan Stewart, 'What Praise Poems are For', *PMLA* 120 (2005), pp. 235-45 (236).

thus far, the relationship can be viewed in some sense as the exchange of protection for praise.

The psalms thus have all the characteristics of epideictic discourse. They are performed in public settings, they reinforce and transmit key cultural values, they center on praise (of God) and blame (of opponents), and they aim to change the hearers' judgments of the current worthiness of the speaker. However the audience is more complicated than that of ancient Greek epideictic. The psalms are directly addressed to God, to whom is attributed the ultimate power to judge, help or ignore the speaker. But they are performed before human spectators, who have the practical power to shun or support the speaker. Public praise from a speaker therefore serves notice to assorted listeners (probably including opponents)—'I'm not finished. You'd better hedge your bets, don't give up on me yet. God hasn't.' The relationships between individual Israelites and God are complex, depending on the individual's personal circumstances and standing in the community. Both the human and divine audiences, in this non-judicial setting, may be persuaded to reserve, pass or reconsider their judgments.

Praise as a Charged Current

One of the most significant ways in which the psalms enrich the rhetorical notion of epideictic discourse is in stretching out the concept of the present or the current moment. In Aristotle's conception of the forums for rhetoric, forensic (judicial) and deliberative (policy) discourse were bounded in episodes that led to an immediate decision or judgment: determining whether a crime was committed by a defendant in court or deciding what military actions to take in the near future toward a foreign power. In contrast, epideictic discourse—outside the context of a speaking contest—did not lead to a decision or action by the audience. The hearers might reflect on the speaker's eloquence; they might decide to give a response. But the occasion did not demand resolution or action. For this reason, epideictic discourse came to be seen as merely ceremonial and lacking in social import.

The Israelite timeframe in the psalms is not bounded into discrete episodes. Praise keeps the current flowing in the continual present. Praising God keeps the relationship current across an individual's lifespan and along the lifespan of the community and, with it, the cultural and ethical values that it explicitly celebrates. The positive value is not all on one side. It is because God needs praise that God needs to be praiseworthy—and must not tolerate injustice, allow loyal innocents to be persecuted or abandon the nation to utter destruction. The threats to the relationship are legion, from temptations to assimilate to neighboring cultures to the daily disappointments of inevitable suffering and loss. Praise must be continual because, as Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca describe the epideictic speaker in *The New Rhetoric*: 'the

one who by speaking wishes to strengthen established values may be likened to the guardian of dikes under constant assault by the ocean'.[21]

Unlike dikes, however, Israelites were expected to have some resilience and capacity for adaptation. The psalms discussed in the remainder of this chapter suggest that the most desirable quality in a speaker is not fixity but changeability, not complacency but openness to refinement, not imperviousness to temptation but recalibration back to the right path.

Psalm 16: Balancing with God's Guidance

Psalm 16 depicts what might be considered the paradigm case of epideictic discourse, a case of an ordinary person using a psalm to keep up good relations with God. The speaker affirms God as the source of all the good that has come his way and requests God to keep him securely on the right path. A closer look, however, reveals the speaker's awareness of the play of chance.

Psalm 16[22]

A David *michtam*

1 Guard me, O God, for I shelter in You.
2 I said to the Lord, 'My Master You are. My good is only through You'.
3 As to holy ones in the land and the mighty who were all my desire,
4 let their sorrows abound—another did they betroth. I will not pour their libations of blood, I will not bear their names on my lips.
5 The Lord is my portion and lot, it is You Who sustain[s] my fate.
6 An inheritance fell to me with delight, my estate too, is lovely to me.
7 I shall bless the Lord Who gave me counsel through the nights that my conscience would lash me.
8 I set the Lord always before me, on my right hand, that I not stumble.
9 So my heart rejoices and my pulse beats with joy, my whole body abides secure.
10 For You will not forsake my life to Sheol, You won't let your faithful one see the Pit.
11 Make me know the path of life. Joys overflow in Your presence, delights in Your right hand forever.

To support his worthiness for this response, the speaker immediately identifies himself with God in vv. 1-2 in three ways: first, in v. 1, by declaring that he trusts God: 'I shelter in You'; then in v. 2, by making a performative statement of allegiance that invokes God's name; and, third, by denying that he receives good from anywhere else. Developing and supporting this latter claim—that God is the speaker's only source of goodness—occupies the rest of the psalm.

21. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, pp. 54-55.
22. Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, pp. 45-47.

In vv. 3-4, the speaker describes the alternative sources of good that he has rejected, those stemming from powerful inhabitants of the land on whom the speaker had previously set his desires.[23] Perhaps the speaker lives in a region with many nearby pagan communities and was tempted to ally himself with them. But because they espouse alien gods, the speaker now wishes their sorrows to multiply. The speaker declines even to name their gods, let alone to make blood libations to them. While this choice is described in definite and even absolute terms, what emerges from the rest of the psalm is a sense of the chanciness and uncertainty of any decision or aspect of life.

In vv. 5-6, the speaker affirms that it is God who controls whatever chance befalls him and describes the good that has come to him in his inheritance and heritage. The chanciness of such bequests is emphasized by words related to casting lots: the nouns חלקי וכוסי ('my portion and lot'), or more literally 'my portion and my cup', the noun גורלי ('my fate'), and the verb נפלו ('fell'). According to Anne Marie Kitz, the Near Eastern root in גורלי ('my fate') refers to stones and וכוסי ('my cup') may refer to the receptacle from which they were cast.[24] In her study of practices across the Near East and Greece, Kitz distinguishes between drawing lots and casting lots to decide how to allocate property: 'Lot casting, it appears, was executed when the deity, who was the actual or implied owner of the items, had the right to determine which person was to receive a particular parcel.'[25] In Ps. 16.6, the speaker says חבלים נפלו לי ('an inheritance fell to me'), with a phrase that literally describes how the ropes that mark the boundaries of a land-holding happened to fall.[26] Of course, the terms for inheritance and heritage refer both to physical property and metaphorically to the speaker's role within Israelite tradition. The speaker emphasizes in v. 6 the pleasant and desirable qualities of what has befallen him.

The image of chance also pervades the next verses, vv. 7-8, which are perhaps intended to explain how the speaker achieved his present favorable state. Having admitted some attraction to the mighty who hastened to other gods (v. 3), the speaker blesses God for counseling him through

23. While Alter and NJPS treat the 'holy ones' as idolators, other translators and commentators have tried to interpret them positively. For a review of the argument that supports with the idolator reading, see Hendrick G.L. Peels, 'Sanctorum communio vel idolorum repudiatio? A Reconsideration of Psalm 16,3', *ZAW* 112 (2000), pp. 239-51.

24. Anne Marie Kitz, 'The Hebrew Terminology of Lot Casting and its Ancient Near Eastern Context', *CBQ* 62 (2000), pp. 207-14. For a similar view, see Walter Brueggemann and William H. Bellinger, Jr, *Psalms* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 87.

25. Kitz, 'Hebrew Terminology', p. 208.

26. The word חבלים (ropes) is used elsewhere in the same sense of land boundaries (Pss. 78.55; 105.11). But its other uses imply life's chanciness: it refers to life-threatening troubles in Pss. 18.5-6; 116.3; 119.61 and 140.6.

troubled thoughts (perhaps lingering temptation) during the night. In v. 7, the word כליותי ('conscience') literally refers to the speaker's kidneys, in Israelite psychology the seat of emotions and affections. Just as the stones in a cup are agitated for casting lots, the speaker's feelings are conflicted in the night; just as God made the lots fall the right way in the allocation of land, so God guides the speaker יעצני ('counseled me') at night to come down on the right side. The decision process involved here, however, is not random or devoid of reason. Rather the image is one of persuasion, with God serving as advisor or guide.

In addition to heeding God's guidance at night, in v. 8, the speaker relies on God as physical guide by day so that he will not stumble or be pulled off-course. The path the speaker is following is literally precarious: he could fall either way. So in v. 8 the speaker chooses to steer by God, setting God simultaneously לנגדי ('before me') and מימיני ('on my right') hand. Following that path leads to a sense of physical security expressed in vv. 9-11 that will preserve the speaker throughout a long life.

In Psalm 16, then, the speaker develops a detailed argument supporting his past, current and future commitment to following God's path as the only way to achieve what is good. The argument is epideictic in focusing on his or her current state of being, a state best characterized as a balancing act on a narrow bridge. The speaker is not arguing to change this state, recognizing that temptations, doubts and chances will always be present, whether from neighbors, unexpected bequests or desires surfacing at night in dreams. In all these circumstances, the speaker attests to seeking and following divine guidance. This is a psalm composed by or for a clear-eyed realist, not an unshakable pietist.

Psalm 26: Ongoing Refinement

Psalm 26 goes even further than Psalm 16 in challenging the notion that the psalms of trust express serenity and unmixed confidence. Rather, the speaker in Psalm 26 invites God to judge, test, try and purify him in an ongoing, life-long process.

Psalm 26[27]

1 For David. Judge me, O Lord. For I have walked in my wholeness, and the Lord I have trusted. I shall not stumble.

2 Test me, O Lord, and try me. Burn pure my conscience and my heart.

3 For Your kindness is before my eyes and I shall walk in Your truth.

4 I have not sat with lying folk nor with furtive men have dealt.

5 I despised the assembly of evildoers, nor with the wicked have I sat.

27. Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, pp. 88-90.

6 Let me wash my palms in cleanness and go round Your altar, Lord,
7 to utter aloud a thanksgiving and to recount all Your wonders.
8 Lord, I love the abode of Your house and the place where Your glory dwells.
9 Do not take my life's breath with offenders nor with blood-guilty men my life,
10 in whose hands there are plots, their right hand full of bribes.
11 But I shall walk in my wholeness. Redeem me, grant me grace.
12 My foot stands on level ground. In the chorus I bless the Lord.

Psalm 26 has stirred longstanding scholarly debate as to both structure and setting. Paul Mosca, who himself champions rhetorical analysis of the psalms, reviews the debate and proposes a five-part structure that I adopt in Figure 1.2 with my own description of each part.[28] This structure reveals an outer frame in which the speaker describes a state of unity with God, walking with wholeness or integrity, without stumbling (vv. 1-3) and on steady ground (vv. 11-12). Within the frame are two passages describing the speaker's relationship to evil-doers, deliberately avoiding them in vv. 4-5 and requesting God not to lump him in with them in vv. 9-10. Between these (vv. 6-8) comes a passage describing the actions the speaker takes at the Temple and his attitude toward God's house.

1-3	I request God's purification and wholeness
4-5	I reject temptations from others
6-8	I value the state of purity in God's proximity
9-10	I seek to avoid the fate of others
11-12	I request redemption, grace, and wholeness

Figure 1.2. *Structure of Psalm 26*

In Mosca's reading, the speaker of the psalm is a Kohen, a Levitical priest descended from Aaron with official duties at the Temple, who is privately praying for God to acknowledge both his physical and moral integrity.[29] Mosca bases his claim in vv. 6-8, where the speaker appears to have access to the inner court of the Temple and the copper laver in which priests are commanded to wash before carrying out a ritual. Physical integrity is as important as moral integrity because blemishes or handicaps would disqualify a priest from certain offices. The threat of death raised in vv. 9-10,

28. Paul G. Mosca, 'Psalm 26: Poetic Structure and the Form-Critical Task', *CBQ* 47 (1985), pp. 212-37.

29. Mosca's reading is compatible in most ways with Craig Broyles's reading of Psalm 26 as a ritual for establishing worthiness for a priest or pilgrim to enter the Temple vicinity on analogy with Psalm 15 and Psalm 24. See Broyles, 'Psalms Concerning Temple Entry', in Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller (eds.), *Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception* (VTSup, 109; Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 248-87.

Mosca argues, comes from the risks associated with conducting sacrificial rites in proximity to the altar. Mosca acknowledges one difficulty for this reading. In v. 7, the speaker promises to לשמע בקול ('utter aloud a thanksgiving') and to ולספר ('recount') God's wonders. However, many scholars believe that it was only the non-priestly Levites who proclaimed and sang psalms, while the Kohanim conducted their rituals in silence.[30] To deal with this difficulty, Mosca proposes grammatical emendations to the two verbs to indicate that the speaker does not utter or recount himself but merely listens in to the proclamations of others while performing his work.

The first verse of the psalm, I argue, is not actually an assertion of the speaker's wholeness but rather part of a series of requests for God to try him and, in fact, to purify him. The term בתומי 'in my wholeness' in v. 1 conveys sincerity more than actual innocence.[31]

The possibility of sin is deepened by the three imperative verbs in Ps. 26.2: בחנני ('test me'), נסני ('try me') and צרופה ('burn pure'). All three derive from the context of metallurgy, where ore is tested for the presence of impurities or refined through smelting to separate out the impurities. The metallurgic connotation is explicit in other psalms, for example כסף צרוף ('silver purged') occurs in Ps. 12.7 and an explicit comparison between בחן ('try') and צרף ('refine') occurs in Ps. 66.10:

Ps. 12.7	The words of the LORD are pure words, silver purged in an earthen crucible, refined sevenfold.
Ps. 66.10	You have tried us, O God, refining us as one refines silver.

The use of these verbs suggests that the speaker is not asserting complete innocence or calling for vindication against false accusations, but rather volunteering for a process of purification and refinement. Part of the process of testing includes making fair judgments of the quality of some material. The theme of equity is also conveyed in v. 2 by the objects of the testing לבי ('my heart') which in Biblical Hebrew describes the seat of understanding and כליותי ('my kidneys') translated here (as in Ps. 16.7) as 'conscience'. Testing these two organs provides a way for God to decide how to give to each person his or her due, for example as reported by the prophet Jeremiah (see also Jer. 11.20 and 20.12):

Jer. 17.10	I the LORD probe the heart, search the mind—to repay every man according to his ways, with the proper fruit of his deeds.

30. See Israel Knohl, 'Between Voice and Silence: The Relationship between Prayer and Temple Cult', *JBL* 115 (1996), pp. 17-30.

31. The same term 'integrity' is used to protest a lack of evil intent or even awareness of sinning in Gen. 20.5-6, 2 Sam. 15.11 and 1 Kgs 22.34.

NJPS translates כליות ('kidneys') here as 'mind'. The key implication is that the process of refinement can be long and difficult. When elements are mixed together, the outcome of the test at any given time is uncertain; any given material does not simply pass or fail the test. Rather it is rated along some scale of purity. On the millesimal fineness scale for silver, even sterling silver contains 75 parts per thousand of copper or other metals. Across a human lifetime, it is unavoidable for those who act in innocence to become impure or contaminated, even unknowingly.

In light of this reading, the speaker's effort to dissociate himself from evil-doers takes on special meaning. The speaker needs to persuade God to continue the refinement process—or perhaps to set the quality standard with mercy and graciousness—because otherwise God is liable to reject him and count him among the wicked. In vv. 4-5, the speaker describes efforts to avoid contamination by staying away from the wicked. The force of vv. 6-8 may simply be an affirmation of the kinds of speech and actions that contrast most with those of the evil-doers, namely offering sacrifices and praising God. In vv. 9-10, the speaker pleads with God to treat him differently from the wicked, using the imperative אל תאסף ('do not take'), or more literally 'do not gather', his life's breath with that of the wicked.

The final section vv. 11-12 continues the theme of evaluation, with the speaker, walking in his state of wholeness, asking to be redeemed and treated with graciousness. The test facing the speaker is the continual need to live in the midst of evil, with the knowledge of his own impurities and with the uncertainty of God's judgment. These ordinary conditions of life are even suggested by the positive and negative associations that the speaker gives to finding himself in assemblies or congregations. In v. 5, the speaker declares his hatred for קהל מרעים ('the assembly of evildoers'); yet in v. 12 the speaker situates himself among others במקהלים ('in the chorus'), engaged in blessing God. The speaker's declaration at the end of v. 1, לא אמעד ('I will not stumble'), seems a play on the word אעמד ('I will stand'), conveying the speaker's awareness of just how possible it is to slip.

In this alternative reading, the speaker of Psalm 26 is another realist aware of the unavoidable presence of evil or impurity, who seeks to persuade God to continue the ongoing process of purging and refinement that any faithful person must undergo.

Psalm 131: Bragging on Quietism

Any theory of epideictic discourse that situates the audience in judgment of the speaker leaves open the possibility of a negative judgment, even though evidence is scarce that such critiques were ever leveled in ancient Greece. However, one psalm of trust, Psalm 131, contrasts so strongly with the rest

in its construction and values that I believe it represents a minority view that the psalmists did not favor.

PSALM 131[32]

1 A song of ascents for David. LORD, my heart has not been haughty, nor have my eyes looked too high, nor have I striven for great things too wondrous for me.

2 But I have calmed and contented myself like a weaned babe on its mother—like a weaned babe I am with myself.

3 Wait, O Israel, for the LORD, now and forevermore.

The speaker in Psalm 131 depicts himself in a state of complete harmony. In v. 1, he disavows arrogance, ambition and even curiosity, declaring that he stays away from גדלות ונפלאות ('great things too wondrous') for him and asserting the absence of these qualities from his לבי ('heart'), עיני ('eyes') and הלכתי ('walk'). In v. 2, the speaker uses positive terms to declare that he has actively sought the opposite qualities, calming and contenting his נפשי ('entire being'). The term שויתי ('calmed') conveys laying even or still; in addition to stillness, the term דוממתי ('contented') also conveys the sense of silencing or keeping mum. From a state of such stillness, it is fitting that this humble speaker can only advise other Israelites to wait as well in v. 3. The speaker takes on exactly those traits of 'un-self-sufficiency' that Moshe Greenberg described as 'the proper stance of man before God'.[33]

What is most striking about this brief psalm—among the briefest in the book of Psalms—is that it contains no thanksgivings, no petitions and no praise. Its positive and negative claims are expressed poetically with parallelism of sounds and syntax but they are not developed with either restatement or supporting observations and reasons. Lack of elaboration may be a sign of confidence in the audience's support and assent, a possibility that will be raised in Chapter 3 in the cases of Psalms 13 and 54. And in fact this positive view is the one most scholars have taken toward Psalm 131. Phil Botha lauds it, saying that it 'must certainly be one of the most beautiful poems ever written'.[34] Robert Alter agrees that the expression of humility is 'simple, concise, and affecting'.[35] Dave Bland conjectures that the speaker's 'childlike' trust is a return to innocence: after having been restless and proud, the psalmist achieves 'victory over frivolous ambition' and becomes calm, composed, content, submissive and silent.[36]

32. Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, p. 457.

33. Greenberg, 'On the Refinement', p. 90.

34. Phil J. Botha, 'To Honour Yahweh in the Face of Adversity: A Socio-Critical Analysis of Psalm 131', *Skrif En Kerk* 19 (1998), pp. 525-33 (525).

35. Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, p. 457.

36. Dave Bland, 'Exegesis of Psalm 62', *ResQ* 23 (1980), pp. 82-95 (86).

But a soul employing brevity is not always a wit; set against Psalms 16 and 26, the speaker in Psalm 131 seems an extraordinarily passive person with little to say for himself. In this case, perhaps the lack of elaboration signals deficiency. This is a speaker who currently has a quiet unchanging life and wants to keep it that way. Certainly the quest to attain knowledge can be dangerously agitating. But avoiding great and wondrous things is not necessarily a good thing; it may even imply staying apart from the divine. The source of the 'great' (גדל) and the 'wondrous' (נפלא) is God, as the speaker declares in Ps. 86.10.

Ps. 86.10	For You are great and work wonders. You alone are God.

The reluctance of the speaker in Psalm 131 to attain knowledge is not echoed in other psalms. For example, the speaker in Ps. 139.6 describes God's scope of knowledge as beyond him but does not denigrate the effort to attain it; he goes on in Ps. 139.14 to acknowledge himself, as a creature of humanity, as one of these works.

Ps. 139.6	Knowledge is too wondrous for me, high above—I cannot attain it.
Ps. 139.14	I acclaim You, for awesomely I am set apart, wondrous are Your acts, and my being deeply knows it.
Ps. 111.2	Great are the deeds of the LORD, discovered by all who desire them.

In the same vein, Ps. 111.2 emphasizes that those who delight in God's great deeds actively seek or inquire into them.

Additional grounds for a critical or at least ambivalent stance toward the speaker of Psalm 131 derives from the use of the verb דוממתי ('I contented myself') in v. 2 without any elaboration of the context. In the Hebrew Bible and especially in other psalms, the verb has both positive and negative connotations. The positive connotation of becoming contented, stilled or self-contained also occurs in three other psalms, Pss. 4.5, 62.5 and 37.7.

Ps. 4.5	Quake, and do not offend. Speak in your hearts on your beds, and be still.
Ps. 62.5	Only in God be quiet, my being, for from Him is my hope.
Ps. 37.7	Be still before the LORD and await Him. Do not be incensed by him who prospers, by the man who devises schemes.

In Psalm 4, those who stray from faithfulness are advised to fight temptation until they become still. In Psalm 62, the speaker who is faithful contrasts his own stillness with the shakiness of those who stray.[37] In Ps. 37.7, still-

37. Psalms 4 and 62 are treated in more detail in Chapter 2.

ness as a sign of faithful patience is advised for those agitated by the injustice of the wicked.

At however state described as stillness is portrayed as inappropriate, particularly when it suppresses either praise of God or challenge of iniquity. In Ps. 30.12, the speaker promises לא ידם ('I will not be still') but instead will praise God. Similarly, to document his integrity, Job demands to know whether he was ever so scared that he ואדם ('ke[pt] silence') in the face of wickedness, especially his own.

Ps. 30.12	O, let my heart hymn You and be not still, LORD, my God, for all time I acclaim You.
Job 31.33-34	Did I hide my transgressions like Adam, bury my wrongdoing in my bosom, That I should [now] fear the great multitude, and am shattered by the contempt of families, so that I keep silent and do not step outdoors?

Seen from a critical standpoint, the speaker in Psalm 131 comes across as someone who can only rouse himself enough to deny any semblance of ambition and to celebrate the successful reduction of his soul to a state of helpless dependence. By risking nothing, he achieves no triumphs and avoids making enemies. As a result, he feels insufficient gratitude to explicitly praise or give thanks and feels insufficient grievance at injustice or danger to require a lament.

From a state of stillness, the speaker can only advise others in v. 3 to wait. The paucity of this advice is highlighted by the use of a nearly identical verse at the conclusion of the adjacent Psalm 130, which offers much more, an abundance of loving-kindness and redemption.

Ps. 130.7	Wait O Israel for the LORD, for with the LORD is steadfast kindness, and great redemption is with Him.

The strong implication of the contrast of similar and neighboring psalms is that asking for nothing much gains nothing much. It is not surprising that the Israelite population included those with a certain degree of passivity. But in its very brevity, Psalm 131 could be signaling that such passivity is far from normative or even ideal for Israelites.

Chapter 2

Instructions for Keeping Faith

In this chapter I bring together three psalms, Psalms 4, 62 and 82, that have not previously been seen as similar. The speakers in these psalms devote unusual attention to other people rather than God, a feature that has generated some debate about the setting of Psalm 4 but that has been generally overlooked in Psalm 62. In only five first-person psalms does a speaker directly address opponents at any length: Psalms 52 and 58, Psalms 4 and 62, and Psalm 82. In Psalms 52 and 58 the speaker's direct address takes the form of 'shock and awe': The opponents are rebuked, reminded of God's might and threatened with complete destruction. Psalms 4 and 62, however, move beyond rebukes to offering advice for returning to faithful or moral practice. Psalm 82 is unique not only because the speaker is God addressing an assembly of deities, but because God offers advice before threatening destruction. I will argue for viewing all three psalms as public efforts by confident speakers to persuade skeptical or immoral hearers to return to moral behavior.

Two Pieces of Rhetorical Theory: Amplitude and Identification

In modern times, the scope of rhetorical theory has broadened beyond the classical venues of courts, legislatures, sanctuaries and civic ceremonials to all occasions for public or professional discourse. In order for a situation to be a rhetorical situation, a speaker must experience a sense of exigence or urgency that can be productively addressed with language.[1] The speaker fashions language into a spoken or written text and delivers it in such a way as to influence a set of hearers/readers who have some ability to affect the situation and perhaps ameliorate the urgency.

Much of rhetorical theory focuses on the challenges of addressing diverse audiences, a topic raised by two of the most important twentieth-century

1. For discussions of whether rhetorical situations simply arise or are constructed, see Lloyd Bitzer, 'The Rhetorical Situation', *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1 (1968), pp. 1-14 and Scott Consigny, 'Rhetoric and its Situations', *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 7 (1974), pp. 175-86.

theorists, the Belgian Chaïm Perelman and the American Kenneth Burke.[2] Both recognized that agreement is a changeable matter of degrees, not absolutes.

In any public gathering, the assembled are likely to represent a wide spectrum of viewpoints. A few agree on most or all points with the speaker, some are opposed on one or two points, some are somewhat negatively disposed and a few are outright hostile. In any given crowd, all types of hearers will be present in greater or lesser proportions, so speakers adjust their strategies accordingly. To move the preponderance of a crowd in his or her direction, a speaker may well focus on winning over a swath of those opposed on just a few points rather than trying to convert the small group of altogether hostile listeners. By standing up to opponents in public, of course, the speaker also encourages those who already agree to remain steadfast.

One useful strategy for addressing diverse audiences is the allocation of material in a text, what Perelman calls 'amplitude' and Burke calls 'amplification'.[3] Perelman observes that a speaker seeking to persuade allocates time carefully: 'the length of each part of his speech will usually be in proportion to the importance he would like to see it occupy in the minds of his hearers'.[4] Perelman notes that repeating a point and elaborating on it increases its presence or salience in the hearers' minds. When addressing a mainly supportive crowd, a speaker may vividly rehearse points everyone agrees on and emphasize their urgency. But when seeking to change the hearers' beliefs, attitudes or behaviors, the speaker must also anticipate points of disagreement. Time and space may be devoted to an accumulation of support for a claim, because different hearers may be susceptible to different reasons and appeals.

Most theorists have discussed amplitude in terms of the patterns with which a point can be developed and elaborated, overlooking its usefulness as an important clue for rhetorical analysis. Looking for where writers have devoted the most space is an important clue to the point they consider most important or most controversial.[5] Gorgias, the ancient Greek sophist, rhetorical theorist, and teacher, did exactly this in his showpiece, the *Encomium*

2. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*; Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

3. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, p. 474; Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, p. 69. For a discussion and history of amplification, see Jeanne Fahnestock, *Rhetorical Style: The Uses of Language in Persuasion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 390-417.

4. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, p. 143.

5. Writers of public policy arguments regularly allocate the greatest proportion of total textual space to the most important and controversial points, as illustrated in Davida Charney and Christine Neuwirth, *Having your Say: Reading and Writing Public Arguments* (New York: Pearson/Longman, 2006).

of Helen.[6] Gorgias considers four causes for Helen's running off with Paris of Troy—the will of the gods, force, persuasion or love, but gives the greatest amplitude, fully one-third of the entire speech, to his métier, persuasion. Amplitude is just one of the means whereby Gorgias uses this speech to explain, illustrate and evoke the power of persuasion. Amplitude will be used in this chapter to help disambiguate the settings of Psalms 4 and 62.

A second important persuasive strategy for the speaker is to create psychological connections with the hearers, a strategy that Perelman calls 'association' and that Burke calls 'identification'. Identification, perhaps the central concept for Burke, can be positive or negative. In the positive form, a speaker emphasizes interests held in common with the hearers. In the negative form, a speaker emphasizes how a rival's interests conflict with those of the hearers. Burke calls this 'identification by antithesis' which creates 'union by some opposition shared in common'.[7] Apart from explicitly criticizing rivals, a speaker may also create dissociation by challenging the meaning of a concept, distinguishing some aspect of it as true or good and disparaging the other. In some cases, as M.A. van Rees notes, the speaker uses definitional or value claims for dissociation, putting two seemingly similar concepts side by side, assigning positive value to one and negative value to the other.[8]

In the readings that follow, I will show the similar ways in which amplitude and identification are deployed in Psalms 4 and 62. In both cases, the strategies aim to turn strayers away from more extreme apostates and back toward faithful moral behavior.

Psalm 4: A Seven-Step Recovery Program

The setting for Psalm 4 has generated some debate: Has the speaker come to the Temple seeking vindication against the false accusations of assembled opponents? Or is the speaker primarily a Temple functionary giving a wisdom-like speech against apostasy?

6. D.M. MacDowell, *Gorgias: Encomium of Helen* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1982).

7. Kenneth Burke, 'The Rhetorical Situation', in Lee Thayer (ed.), *Communication: Ethical and Moral Issues* (New York: Routledge, 1973), pp. 263-74.

8. M.A. van Rees, 'Indicators of Dissociation', in Franz H. van Eemeren and Peter Houtlosser (eds.), *Argumentation in Practice* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2005), pp. 53-67. The economist and commentator Paul Krugman created this kind of dissociation in an op-ed column, 'Boring Cruel Romantics', *New York Times* (20 November 2011), p. A29. Krugman, who considers himself a 'technocrat', challenges the application of this term to new leaders in Europe who are bent on implementing fiscal austerity. Krugman argues that these leaders 'are not technocrats. They are, instead, deeply impractical romantics.'

Psalm 4[9]

1 For the lead player, with stringed instruments, a David psalm.

2 When I call out, answer me, my righteous God. In the straits, You set me free. Have mercy upon me and hear my prayer.

3 Sons of man, how long will My glory be shamed? You love vain things and seek out lies. Selah

4 But know that the Lord set apart His faithful. The Lord will hear when I call to Him.

5 Quake, and do not offend. Speak in your hearts on your beds, and be still. Selah

6 Offer righteous sacrifices and trust in the Lord.

7 Many say, 'Who will show us good things?' Lift up the light of Your face to us, Lord.

8 You put joy in my heart, from the time their grain and their drink did abound.

9 In peace, all whole, let me lie down and sleep. For You, Lord, alone, do set me down safely.

The false-accusation reading is the standard, adopted by Hans-Joachim Kraus, Richard Clifford, and Brueggemann and Bellinger, among others.[10] Anti-apostasy readings have been offered by Steven Croft, Craig Broyles and John Goldingay.[11] In reviewing the debate, Rolf Jacobson shows that both readings plausibly account for some but not all the contentious points of translation and interpretation.[12] No one takes the two readings as mutually exclusive; as Jacobson argues, there is no 'altar of certitude' on which to decide among historical, theological and canonical readings. However, seeking evidence for competing interpretations often highlights important elements within and across psalms. In this case, scholars have thus far overlooked the similarity of Psalms 4 and 62.

Psalm 4 can be divided by addressee into three sections. The speaker addresses God in the frame v. 2 and vv. 8-9 but addresses opponents in the central section, as sketched below. Clearly, the preponderance of space is devoted to the opponents. As I show in Figure 2.1, even the final two verses can be read as a rejoinder to opponents.

9. Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, pp. 10-11.

10. Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59* (trans. H.C. Oswald; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1988); Richard Clifford, *Psalms 1–72* (AOTC; Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), pp. 52-55; Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms*, p. 40.

11. Steven J.L. Croft, *The Identity of the Individual in the Psalm*s (JSOTSup, 44; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987); Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999); John Goldingay, 'Psalm 4: Ambiguity and Resolution', *TynBul* 57 (2006), pp. 161-72.

12. Rolf Jacobson, 'The Altar of Certitude', in R. Foster and D.M. Howard, Jr (eds.), *My Words are Lovely: Studies in the Rhetoric of the Psalms* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2008), pp. 3-18.

1	Superscription
2	Plea to God for attention
3	Rebuke to opponents for apostasy/false accusation
4	Advice to opponents
5	Advice to opponents
6	Advice to opponents
7	Citation of opponents' response/Expression of trust
8	Rejoinder/Expression of trust
9	Rejoinder/Expression of trust

Figure 2.1. *Structure of Psalm 4*

The opening verse, v. 2, is a fairly standard address, establishing the speaker as a faithful Israelite who calls on God in times of trouble and expects to be answered. In contrast to the opening of most laments, the speaker makes no additional calls for God's attention and gives no description of the current situation. So, while v. 2 may be setting up expectations of a charge of false accusation, it also sets up a dramatic reversal. The assembled hearers are led to expect a lament, but the speaker instead turns and rebukes them.

The rebuke that opens the lengthy central section (vv. 3-7) comes in the form of a rhetorical question: 'how long will my glory be shamed?' The interpretation of כבודי ('my glory') is crucial for deciding between the false accusation and anti-apostasy readings. False accusation readings of Psalm 4 seize on the phrase as a reference to the speaker's own honor or reputation because little else in the psalm refers to attacks on the speaker. Such attacks are quite explicit in other psalms assigned to the false accusation category.[13] In contrast, the anti-apostasy reading takes the speaker's glory to be God.[14] Glory is used in exactly this sense in two other contexts that refer to acts of apostasy, Ps. 106.19-20 which refers to the golden calf and Jer. 2.11 in which God refers to Israelites adopting other gods.

Ps. 106.19-20	They made a calf at Horeb and bowed to a molten image. And they exchanged their glory for the image of a grass-eating bull.
Jer. 2.11	Has any nation changed its gods even when they are no-gods? But My people has exchanged its glory for what can do no good.

13. For a close discussion of the criteria that should be applied to this category, see William H. Bellinger, Jr, 'Psalms of the Falsely Accused: A Reassessment', *SBL Seminar Papers* 25 (1986), pp. 463-69. Bellinger distinguishes between false-accusation psalms where the context of a judicial proceeding seems justified (Psalms 7, 17 and 27) from apparent cases where opponents seem merely to be engaging in malicious gossip (Psalms 31, 64 and 28). Only the former include uses of legal language and forms: self-imprecation, appeals for acquittal, and oaths; references to a 'just cause'; and verbs of testing and trying.

14. See references in nn. 10 and 11 for further discussion of these options.

Interpreting the opponents as apostates in v. 3 sets up a clear contrast between those who love worthless things and seek lies (i.e., loving and listening to gods that aren't real gods) and those in v. 4 who are faithful to God, in particular the speaker. Notably the verse omits any reference to injuries at the hands of the opponents, which might be expected in a false accusation psalm or lament.

The speaker follows the rebuke with an extended effort to persuade opponents to return to faithful observance and offers a specific process for doing so. The first step of this process, in v. 4, is reminiscent of contemporary self-help programs: asking hearers to admit that they have a problem in lacking God's favor. He urges them to דעו ('realize') which god it is who hears, God not the idols, and to know who it is that God will answer, namely the speaker and not the hearers. Six more steps are spelled out in vv. 5-6 with three pairs of imperative verbs set in a logical progression: quake and refrain, speak and be still, offer and trust. The first verb in each pair is an action and the second an inaction.

The first pair, 'tremble, sin no more', refers to getting out of the habit of apostasy. The verb רגזו ('quake') is found four other times in the psalms (Pss. 18.9; 77.17, 19; 99.1), all of which describe the physical world exhibiting awe of God—the hills, the water, the earth. If awe of God can inspire nature to quake, then apostates can find it in themselves to do the same. Paired with quaking is the inaction of not sinning; that is, the apostate is urged to intentionally refrain from inappropriate action. The first pair, then, refers to externally manifested behavior.

The next pair are psychological steps: speaking and becoming still in bed, where, as Michael Barré has noted, a person is most sincere.[15] The image of overcoming internal debate while in bed also occurs in Ps. 16.7 in which the speaker is helped by God's counsel after being lashed by his conscience (or kidneys). The speaker in Ps. 4.5 is instructed to engage in this internal struggle. Pairing this struggle with an effort to become still is far from contradictory. In fact, the sense of דומם ('stilling') as a recovery from agitation is also posited in Ps. 131.2 by Phil J. Botha and H. Stephen Shoemaker.[16] Achieving stillness after struggling against the lures of materialism and other gods would be quite an accomplishment for apostates.

The final pair of imperative verbs, in Ps. 4.6, is 'offer and trust'. After feeling awe, refraining from sin, struggling with temptation and achieving stillness, the strayer is ready to make a positive action to serve God. The

15. Michael Barré reviews biblical images of conscience-stricken insomnia in 'Hearts, Beds, and Repentance in Psalm 4,5 and Hosea 7,14', *Bib* 76 (1995), pp. 53-62.

16. Botha, 'To Honour Yahweh'; H. Stephen Shoemaker, 'Psalm 131', *RevExp* 85.1 (1988), pp. 89-94. In contrast, Barré ('Hearts, Beds', pp. 58-60) translates this pair of verbs as 'quake' and 'wail'. Raabe ('Deliberate Ambiguity', p. 215) gives a helpful suggestion that the resonance of stilling and wailing enriches the effect.

emphasis on making 'righteous' sacrifices may be needed for people who are partially assimilated; apostates may well have been combining practices appropriate for YHWH with those distinctly associated with foreign gods. Only purely appropriate sacrifice can lead to a final state of trust in God. The ordering of sacrifice before trust implies that practice may precede belief, a positioning that echoes Exod. 24.7, 'we will do and we will hear'.

Thus the greatest amplitude in Psalm 4, the bulk of the space, is devoted to addressing opponents with a rebuke followed by a persuasive and poetic sequence of steps that strayers can follow to return to faithfulness. While it is still possible to view the speaker as a troubled petitioner, his attention is almost exclusively devoted to the future behavior of the opponents, rather than to securing rescue or vindication.

Returning to faithfulness is also promoted through the strategy of identification. The speaker uses positive identification in the framing sections by modeling appropriate behavior and referring to first-hand experiences. While v. 2 is addressed to God, it also establishes the speaker as someone בצר ('in dire straits'), who has suffered 'distress' and who calls out to God. This is not someone whose life has gone altogether smoothly—a history that hearers of all degrees of faithfulness are likely to share. While the speaker may have been unusually successful when he has called to God (vv. 2 and 4), being answered or relieved in times of trouble is a shared goal that they all aspire to. More shared goals are set out in vv. 8-9. The speaker is able to sleep soundly and quietly at night, in contrast to the quaking hearers in v. 5, and achieves joy in his relationship with God, a joy that may match or exceed 'the good' that the hearers are seeking in v. 7. These positive forms of identification set up the speaker as someone who is enough like the hearers that they may feel motivated to reconnect with God. Thus the frame of the psalm strengthens the force of the process for returning in the central verses.

The most powerful strategy in Psalm 4, however, is the use of disidentification in vv. 7-9 where the speaker pulls receptive opponents away from extremists who are characterized as greedy and irreverent. The dissociation is accomplished in part by a change in voice. Up until now, in vv. 4-6, the speaker has addressed the opponents directly using the second person. He has accused all those assembled of seeking vain things and lies. But in v. 7, the voice shifts. In v. 7, the speaker figuratively points at רבים (the 'many') who are asking, in essence, which god will provide 'the good(s)', namely, material rewards. The speaker is like a school principal at an assembly announcing 'students have been sassing teachers and writing graffiti on the walls'. The culprits are present and well-known to the crowd, as if the principal had said 'and you all know very well who they are'. By referring to the worst culprits in the third person, the speaker is inviting the lesser offenders to distance themselves from the habitual or extreme offenders. Then the speaker reports what the offenders are saying.

The direct quote from this group is confined to the question ‘Who will show us good things?’ in Alter’s translation as well as in the NJPS. However, I believe that the quote should be read as extending to the end of v. 7, ‘Many say, “Who will show us good things? Lift up the light of Your face to us LORD”’, as in the RSV. The extremists are not seriously asking for the favor of God’s face but are mockingly asserting that they don’t need it; apparently, they are worshipping other gods because they have prospered materially by doing so. The indirect reference to the lifting of God’s face from the Priestly Blessing (Num. 6.24-26) is then an especially cheeky bit of mockery.[17] The key to interpreting v. 7 is remembering that it is the speaker who is reporting the putative words of the offenders. The balder and more irreverent the words of the extremists, the better for the speaker’s goals. Hearers who have not strayed quite so far may be shocked by the alleged mockery at the same moment as they are pushed by the pronouns to take sides, either to identify with the ‘us’ of the extremists or to see the extremists as ‘them’ along with the upright speaker.

In the concluding two verses, Ps. 4.8-9, the speaker returns to addressing God, providing the usual closing expression of praise and trust. Goldingay sees the speaker, having failed to reach people with a ‘bad attitude’, moving on to his or her own concerns, simply hoping ‘that God may change these people’.[18]

But it is also possible to interpret vv. 8-9 as a rejoinder to the extremists’ view. The speaker concedes in v. 8 that the apostates have gained material rewards: דגנם ותרושם (‘their grain and their drink’). But the speaker trumps these rewards with the greater joy he receives from communing with God. Goldingay notes that the timing of the speaker’s joy is ambiguous. On one hand, מעת may be translated as ‘at the same time’. In this case, the speaker feels joy *even at the moment when* the opponents seem to be rewarded. But מעת may also be translated (as Jacobson does) as a comparative ‘more than when’, implying that the speaker’s joy is greater than the joy coming from material rewards. Either way, the speaker is challenging the value of the apostates’ goods.

The final verse, v. 9, with its reference to sleeping well and having peace, contrasts directly with the state prescribed for the strayers in v. 5. The reference to peace, Goldingay suggests, harkens back to the final part of the Priestly Blessing, which conveys a state of physical completeness or well-being. The speaker is not joyful in the face of deprivation, but in the expectation that God also provides sufficient material sustenance.

17. In addition to reading this phrase as mockery, Goldingay also admits a translation of it as an assertion of estrangement: ‘the light of your face has fled from over us’ (‘Psalm 4’, p. 167). In this, he follows John H. Eaton, ‘Psalm 4:7’, *Theology* 67 (1964), pp. 355-57.

18. Goldingay, ‘Psalm 4’, p. 170.

In sum, the speaker's persuasive power derives from the considerable space devoted to addressing and referring to the strayers, the choice and sequence of imperative verbs used to address them, as well as the use of both positive and negative strategies of identification to draw the strayers toward the speaker and away from more extreme rivals.

Psalm 62: Restoring the Expletive

The setting for Psalm 62 has not seemed controversial; it is generally taken as a call from an individual for vindication or rescue. Kraus and Mandolfo see the speaker as an ordinary individual, one facing persecution and seeking judicial or divine protection at the sanctuary.[19] Croft and Dave Bland see the speaker as an embattled king seeking an oracle of safety when facing treachery or a military siege.[20] However, on closer examination, the case for seeing the speaker as a petitioner is actually quite weak.

PSALM 62[21]

1		For the lead player, on *jeduthun*, a David psalm.
2	אך	Only in God is my being quiet. From Him is my rescue.
3	אך	Only He is my rock and my rescue. I shall not stumble at all.
4	עד אנה	How long will you demolish a man—commit murder, each one of you—like a leaning wall, a shaky fence?
5	אך	Only from his high place they schemed to shake him. They took pleasure in lies. With their mouths they blessed and inwardly cursed. Selah
6	אך	Only in God be quiet, my being, for from Him is my hope.
7	אך	Only He is my rock and my rescue, my fortress—I shall not stumble.
8	על	From God is my rescue and glory, my strength's rock and my shelter in God.
9	בטחו	Trust in Him at all times, O people. Pour out your hearts before Him. God is our shelter. Selah
10	אך	Only breath—humankind, the sons of man are a lie. On the scales all together they weigh less than a breath.
11	אל	Do not trust in oppression and of theft have no illusions. Though it bear fruit of wealth, set your heart not upon it.
12	אחת	One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that strength is but God's,
13	ולך	and Yours, Master is kindness. For You requite a man by his deeds.

In the petitioner reading, a vulnerable speaker is seeking protection in a religious or judicial setting. It is the speaker who is the subject of the attacks

19. Carleen Mandolfo, *God in the Dock: Dialogic Tension in the Psalms of Lament* (JSOTSup, 357; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), p. 18. Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*.

20. Croft, *The Identity of the Individual*, p. 127; Bland, 'Exegesis of Psalm 62'.

21. Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, pp. 213-15.

of the crowd, who at times feels safe in God's refuge and at times feels as weak as a tottering fence, who swings between complaining and expressing trust. Having reached safety by the end, the speaker can indulge in a hortatory impulse to advise the opponents to give up their bad ways.

But the case for seeing the speaker as a conflicted petitioner is quite weak. Yes, the plot in vv. 4-5 is similar to laments in which enemies try to trap or trip up a speaker using lies, wiles or violence (e.g., Psalms 35; 64; 140). But unlike these psalms, Psalm 62 makes no direct second-person plea to God for rescue. The speaker never asks God 'when will you rescue me?' In fact, the speaker never connects the threat to himself with any first-person reference. The speaker does not say '*I* am like a leaning wall' and does not ask 'when will you stop trying to murder *me*?' Instead the victim is consistently described in impersonal and non-specific terms, in the third person or as איש ('a man'). While it is possible for איש ('a man') to refer back to the speaker, the word is not used as a self-reference in that way in any of the 35 other psalms where it occurs. Thus the target of the opponents seems not to be the speaker but rather an unnamed third party, who may or may not be present.[22] The speaker's purpose then is not to protest on his own behalf but, like the speaker in Psalm 4, to rebuke a crowd of people for attacking another person or people. He is making a public effort to persuade hearers to return to faithful, moral behavior. Rather than oscillating between trust and doubt, the speaker is consistent in modeling a sense of security while trying to protect the weak-willed from the bad influence of the opponents. To support this reading, I will again examine both the amplitude of points and the use of identification.

Space in Psalm 62, as sketched below, is dominated by the speaker's expressions of trust in God as a personal refuge and rescuer at the opening, center and closing of the psalm. The repetition of the phrasing 'Only He is my rock and my rescue. I shall not stumble at all' from vv. 2-3 in vv. 6-8 turn these verses into a refrain bracketing the rebukes. Repetition is the classic form of amplitude; here it emphasizes and re-emphasizes the speaker's security and contrasts it to the doubts and weaknesses of the others.

The seven verses expressing security (vv. 2-3, 6-8 and 12-13) create a lattice-work to enclose the five verses addressed to opponents: a rebuke in vv. 4-5 and a sequence of prescriptions in vv. 9-11. The amplitude of the psalm thus projects stability.

As in Psalm 4, the rebuke in Ps. 62.4-5 opens with questions addressed to all the hearers challenging their misdeeds. Rather than worshipping other gods, however, these hearers seem to be attacking other members

22. Brueggemann and Bellinger also translate איש as 'a person', an unnamed victim (*Psalms*, p. 274).

1	Superscription
2	God as refuge
3	God as refuge
4	Direct rebuke
5	Indirect rebuke. Selah.
6	God as refuge
7	God as refuge
8	God as refuge
9	Process: Trust and pour out. Selah.
10	Human strength/value as illusory
11	Process: Reject violence; reject robbery; reject ill-gotten gains.
12	God's might
13	God's faithfulness; God's fairness.

Figure 2.2. *Structure of Psalm 62*

of the community and leading them astray. They seek to push the victim down from משאתו ('his elevation'), a less than challenging task given that the man is already as weak as כקיר נטוי ('a leaning wall') and גדר הדחויה ('a shaky fence'). As lofty and secure as the man may once have been, he is now literally a push-over. The speaker addresses the tempters, but by offering shelter to the weak, he also rails at those feeling pressured to give in to them.

As in Psalm 4, the prescribed actions for recovery in Ps. 62.9-11 follow a logical order. The first two steps, in v. 9, are for the opponents בטחו ('to trust') in God and שפכו לבבכם ('to pour out') their hearts to God. The series of imperatives is interrupted in v. 10 with a reminder that humans lack strength, endurance and value—the very qualities repeatedly attributed to God in the three-part frame. Gaining security from relying on God rather than humans enables the opponents to reorder their values. Accordingly, in v. 11, they are told to renounce robbery and ill-gotten gains. The renunciation, in three negative commands, is more cognitive than active: תבטחו אל ('don't trust'), אל תהבלו ('don't be deluded') and אל תשיתו לב ('don't set your heart'). The negative commands mirror the earlier positives: trust/don't trust, pour/don't set. As in Psalm 4, the underlying motive for straying turns out to be greed, an attraction to material reward. So the wisdom-like pronouncements in the closing verses, vv. 12-13, serve as a rebuttal. In the greater scheme of things, material gain is immaterial because God balances the accounts.

Viewing the psalm as a public argument against greed-induced bad behavior changes the speaker from an aggrieved victim into moral agent. The speaker also comes across as a virtuoso performer, by virtue of the careful balance of space, the refrains and the sound pattern of the verses

(discussed below). These qualities set the speaker apart from the crowd, as someone to be admired. The speaker makes some of the same gestures of positive identification as the speaker in Psalm 4. The repeated declarations of security show the speaker to be successful in calling on God in times of trouble. In v. 2, the speaker alludes to previous struggles from which דומיה נפשי ('is my being quiet') he has achieved stillness and been rescued. He even qualifies his stability in v. 3, לא אמוט רבה ('I shall not stumble at all'). But it is only at the key moment of prescribing steps for returning to faithfulness in v. 9 that the speaker invites the hearers into a shared space by referring to the hearers as עם ('nation') and referring to God as מחסה לנו ('our refuge') rather than 'my refuge'.

That this speaker is more showman than shepherd is also evident in his use of disidentification. The initial rebuke in v. 4 is hyperbolic, asking when the entire crowd כלכם ('all of you') will stop destroying and murdering a weak-willed victim. He's asking the classic loaded question: 'When will you stop beating your wife?' Everyone and no one is singled out. Then, as in Psalm 4, the speaker shifts to talking about the offenders in the third person. In v. 5, he accuses 'them' of scheming, lying and hypocrisy. At this point, hearers may well shift mentally away from others around them, especially if the unnamed victim, rather than representing a general type, is a specific person who has been dallying with the wrong crowd. Anyone who has committed minor offenses feels singled out for rebuke—but can still feel superior to others in the crowd who may be guilty of worse. The advice for recovering stability and moral values in vv. 9-11 is useful for everyone, waverers and tempters alike.

The most potent persuasive device in Psalm 62 is the sound pattern of the verse-initial Hebrew words. The initial words of all but one verse begin with vowels (א, ע, ו), as shown in Figure 2.3, with the exclamation *ach* (אך) at the head of six verses. While biblical scholars have often noted the pattern, it has generally gone unrepresented in translation.[23] Alter tries to capture part of the effect by using 'only' wherever *ach* (אך) appears. But even he misses the rest of the alliteration and the important role of *ach* (אך) as a stand-alone exclamation. Rendering the word *ach* (אך) as 'indeed' or 'surely' is in many ways less effective than simply writing 'Ahhh'.

The opening alliteration across all the verses must have been quite striking in oral performance. A skillful speaker may draw out or cut short such

23. Bland, 'Exegesis of Psalm 62' is one of the few commentators who notes the alliteration of the vowel-initial words in the first half of the psalm as well as the adversative meaning of אך. Jin H. Han in his recent talk 'Lists with Wit in Proverbs' at the SBL meeting in Chicago (17 November 2012) noted similar aural uses of wit outside the psalms.

		Alter	NJPS	KJV	RSV
1					
2	אך	Only	Truly	Truly	For
3	אך	Only	Truly	He only	He only
4	עד אנה	How	How	How	How
5	אך	Only	They	They only	They only
6	אך	Only	Truly	My soul	For God
7	אך	Only	He	He only	He only
8	על	From	I	In God	On God
9	בטחו	Trust	Trust	Trust	Trust
10	אך	Only	Men	Surely	Men
11	אל	Do not	Do not	Trust not	Put
12	אחת	One	One	God	Once
13	ולך	And you	And	Also unto	And

Figure 2.3. *Verse-Initial Words in Psalm 62*

sonorous open vowels in attention-getting ways, playing with drama or humor. In particular, after hearing a pattern of six verses with אך, hearers may well have expected a canonical seventh in v. 12, when what they got instead of *ach* (אך) was *akhat* (אחת) 'one'. The break in pattern emphasizes the 'one' word from God. More importantly, the pattern of alliteration itself breaks in only one place and at the most important moment. Verse 9 opens with the word *bit-khu* (בטחו) 'trust', replacing a sonorant with a voiced stop or plosive consonant. The pattern breaks at the very point where the speaker commands the hearers to return to faithful behavior, with the first step being to trust in God.

Finally, the sense of *ach* (אך) adds to the effect that the speaker is engaging with the crowd. Norman Snaith argues that the *ach* (אך) always carries a restrictive or adversative meaning.[24] He translates it as 'yes but on the contrary' or 'despite' or 'whatever may be said to the contrary'. So, while the speaker of Psalm 62 is less explicit than the speaker in Psalm 4 in anticipating and responding to the opponents' objections, he may skillfully use the repetitions of *ach* (אך) to suggest that he sees his claims as sufficient response to whatever they might say. The translation offered below conveys some of these effects.

24. Norman Henry Snaith, 'The Meaning of the Hebrew "אך"', *VT* 14 (1964), pp. 221-25.

Psalm 62: Alternative Translation

1		For the leader, on *jeduthun*, a David psalm.
2	אך	Ach! In God does my being find quiet. From Him comes my rescue.
3	אך	Ach! He is my rock, my rescue. I hardly stumble at all.
4	עד אנה	Until when will you batter a man—commiting murder, each of you—like a leaning wall, a tottering fence?
5	אך	Ach! From his perch they schemed to shake him. They enjoyed their lies. Outwardly their mouths blessed and inwardly they cursed. Selah
6	אך	Ach! In God find quiet, my being, for from him comes my hope.
7	אך	Ach! He is my rock, my rescue, my fortress—I barely stumble.
8	על	In God I find rescue and glory, rock-hard strength, and shelter in God.
9	בטחו	Bank on him at all times, O people. Pour your hearts out before him. God is our shelter. Selah
10	אך	Ach! A mere breath—humanity, the sons of man are a lie. All together on the scales, they amount to less than a breath.
11	אל	Avoid banking on coercion and of theft disabuse yourself. Though it produce wealth, do not set your heart on it.
12	אחת	A catchphrase of God is told, a by-word have I heard: that strength is none but God's,
13	ולך	and yours, Master is kindness. For you requite a man according to his deeds.

Overall, taking the speaker of Psalm 62 as a confident and secure individual aiming to persuade an unruly crowd produces a coherent reading that accounts for the careful balancing of space between expressing security and addressing opponents, the contrast between God's power and human instability and evanescence, and the carefully designed sound pattern that heightens attention to the command to 'trust in God'. The psalm presents a unified and striking statement of communal values. As Jeffrey Walker notes in his analysis of oral poetic argument in archaic Greece, 'the successful poem will offer its audience an elegant, memorable, aesthetically satisfying representation of situations and attitudes with which they more or less identify already: the audience sees itself, or its values, reflected strikingly'.[25]

Psalm 82: Persuading Gods

The rhetorical situation employed in Psalm 4 and Psalm 62 involves a speaker offering himself and his ongoing experiences as a living example to the audience. Hearers who are already in close alignment with the speaker's values see them as validated, while those opposed in some way are rebuked

25. Walker, *Rhetoric and Poetics*, p. 268.

but also invited to take specific steps toward the speaker and away from more extreme opponents.

Psalm 82[26]

1 An Asaph psalm. God takes His stand in the divine assembly, in the midst of the gods He renders judgment.
2 'How long will you judge dishonestly, and show favor to the wicked? Selah
3 Do justice to the poor and the orphan. Vindicate the lowly and the wretched.
4 Free the poor and the needy, from the hand of the wicked save them.
5 They do not know and do not grasp, in darkness they walk about. All the earth's foundations totter.
6 As for Me, I had thought you were gods, and the sons of the Most High were you all.
7 Yet indeed like humans you shall die, and like one of the princes, fall'.
8 Arise O God, judge the earth, for You hold in estate all the nations.

This rhetorical situation arguably applies in one additional psalm, Psalm 82. In this case, of course, the speaker addressing a straying audience is not an ordinary person but God, and the opponents are other gods. The unique opening verse sets the context from an otherworldly observer's standpoint. Yet Psalm 82 shares many features with the other two psalms. The preponderance of space is devoted to direct address of the opponents from a first-person speaker, the rebuke takes the form of a question, and a process for returning to the right path is laid out in a series of imperatives (see Figure 2.4).

1 Context
2 Direct rebuke
3 Process
4 Process
5 Indirect rebuke
6 Direct rebuke
7 Direct rebuke
8 Appeal to God

Figure 2.4. *Structure of Psalm 82*

In light of the other two psalms, what seems most striking about Psalm 82 is its lack of persuasive strategies. The setting of the divine assembly portrays God among a set of peers. Without any first-person self-references in vv. 1-2, however, there is little effort at positive identification. Rather than a sequence of self-help actions, the imperatives in vv. 3-4, שפטו ('judge'),

26. Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, pp. 291-93.

הצדיקו ('vindicate'), פלטו ('rescue') and הצילו ('save'), all refer to actions the gods should take toward others, the lowly and the poor. These directives do allow for the possibility that some gods might reform.[27] The shift from second to third person in v. 5 allows for a dissociative reading, castigating some of the gods as worse than others. However, the speaker's final statements return to addressing and condemning כלכם ('all of you') in the audience. On the whole, the absence of persuasive strategies indicates that the speaker is using the barest possible framework of claims with the intention more to condemn than to move the hearers.[28]

Yet the similarities between Psalm 82 and the more persuasive Psalms 4 and 62 are enough to cause a productive resonance. The similarity of the rebukes in both form (questions) and content (favoring material success) underscore the moral force of the human speakers: no matter how powerful the human opponents, they can never hope to escape judgment any more than can foreign gods. Yet, from the perspective of Psalm 82, the human speakers in the other two psalms seem even more approachable to their peers. In their self-references, the human speakers do not make themselves out to be God-like; they admit to the need for safety and security. As a result, the actions that the speakers prescribe end up seeming more achievable. The more formal setting of the assembly and the language of judgment in Psalm 82 bespeak a final resolution for the wayward gods. The human opponents, by contrast, seem to be afforded much more opportunity to change their ways, rejoin the community of loyal Israelites, and live.

Conclusion: Bait and Switch?

In this chapter, I have promoted anti-apostasy readings of Psalms 4 and 62. In both cases, the speakers deploy an array of persuasive strategies to persuade strayers to return to faithful behavior, a mission that the speaker in Ps. 51.15 also subscribes to: 'I will teach transgressors Your ways that sinners may return to You'. But if the strayers are the intended hearers and the targets of the speakers' persuasive strategies, why do Psalms 4 and 62 look so much like other individual psalms, whether psalms of lament, thanksgiving or trust, where both the underlying and ostensible addressee is God? Psalm 4 both opens and closes by calling on God's protection, as in many laments.

27. David Frankel considers and rejects this possibility in 'El as the Speaking Voice in Psalm 82:6-8', *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 10 (2010), pp. 2-24.

28. The final verse turns God's actions in the divine assembly into a precedent for applying the same remedy to corrupt judges and rulers on earth. Rolf Jacobson (*Many are Saying: The Function of Direct Discourse in the Hebrew Psalter* [New York: T. & T. Clark, 2004], pp. 113-14) raises the possibility that the final verse was added to a previously existing text to turn it into a persuasive petition to God. My reading of God's speech does not require such an assumption.

Psalm 62 opens by expressing trust in God and closes by declaring God's power, as in many psalms of trust. If we assume that many first-person psalms were performed in public places by talented poets and musicians, then they may have attracted hearers of many stripes. It is possible that the speakers of these psalms used the usual setting as bait to attract crowds that included many strayers who expected to hear an ordinary lament or thanksgiving, but then switched tack to address the strayers directly.

In supporting the anti-apostasy readings, I'm not intending to offer them up on the altar of certainty that Rolf Jacobson has rightly rejected. Every psalm can support a variety of readings, even those that seem mutually exclusive. My goal here rather has been to raise attention to the value of contemporary rhetorical theory for recognizing additional aspects of a psalm that should be considered when weighing the plausibility of alternative readings.